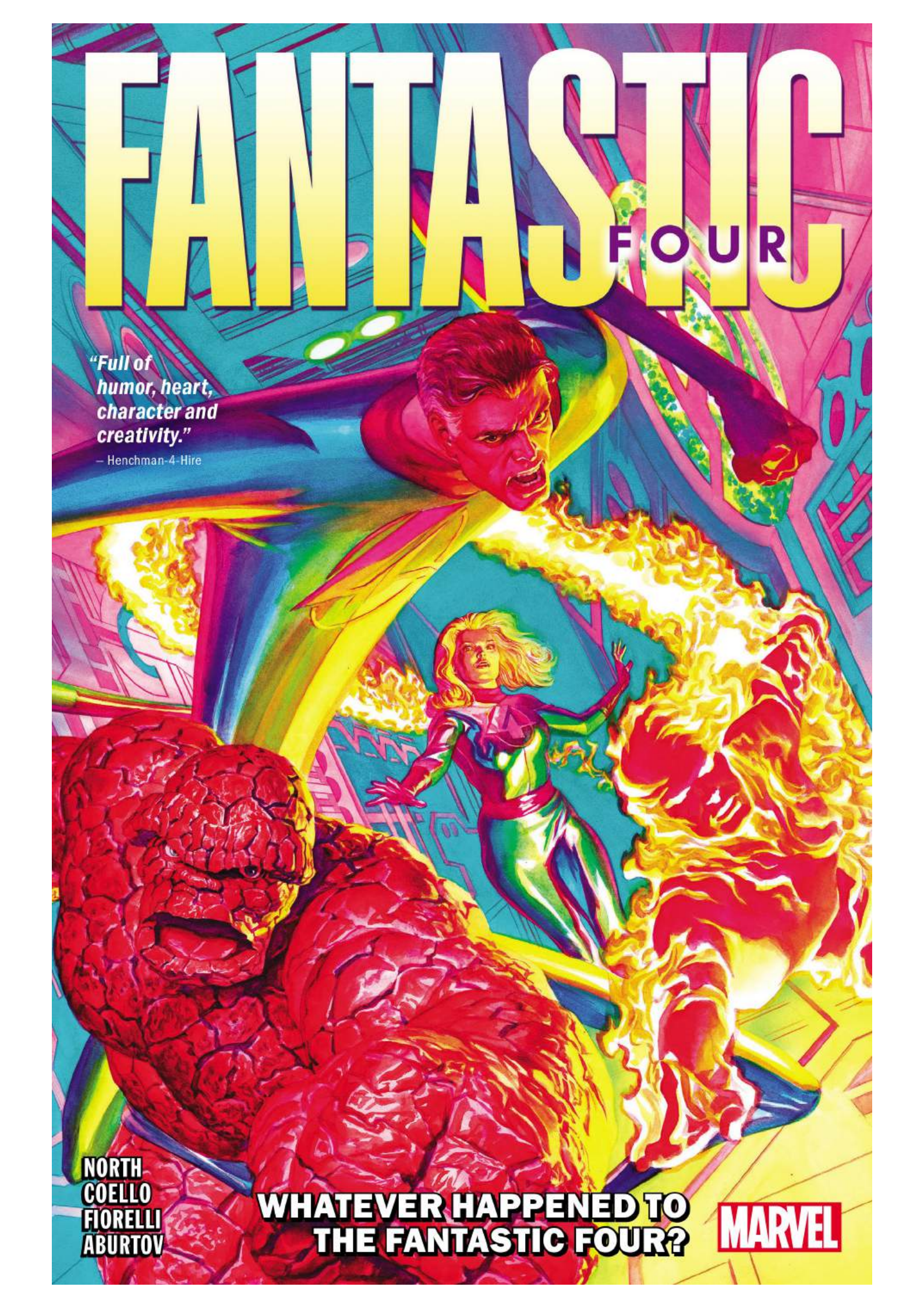


FANTASTIC FOUR



*"Full of
humor, heart,
character and
creativity."*

— Henchman-4-Hire

**NORTH
COELLO
FIORELLI
ABURTOV**

**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO
THE FANTASTIC FOUR?**

MARVEL

FANTASIES FOR



FANTASTIC FOUR

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR?

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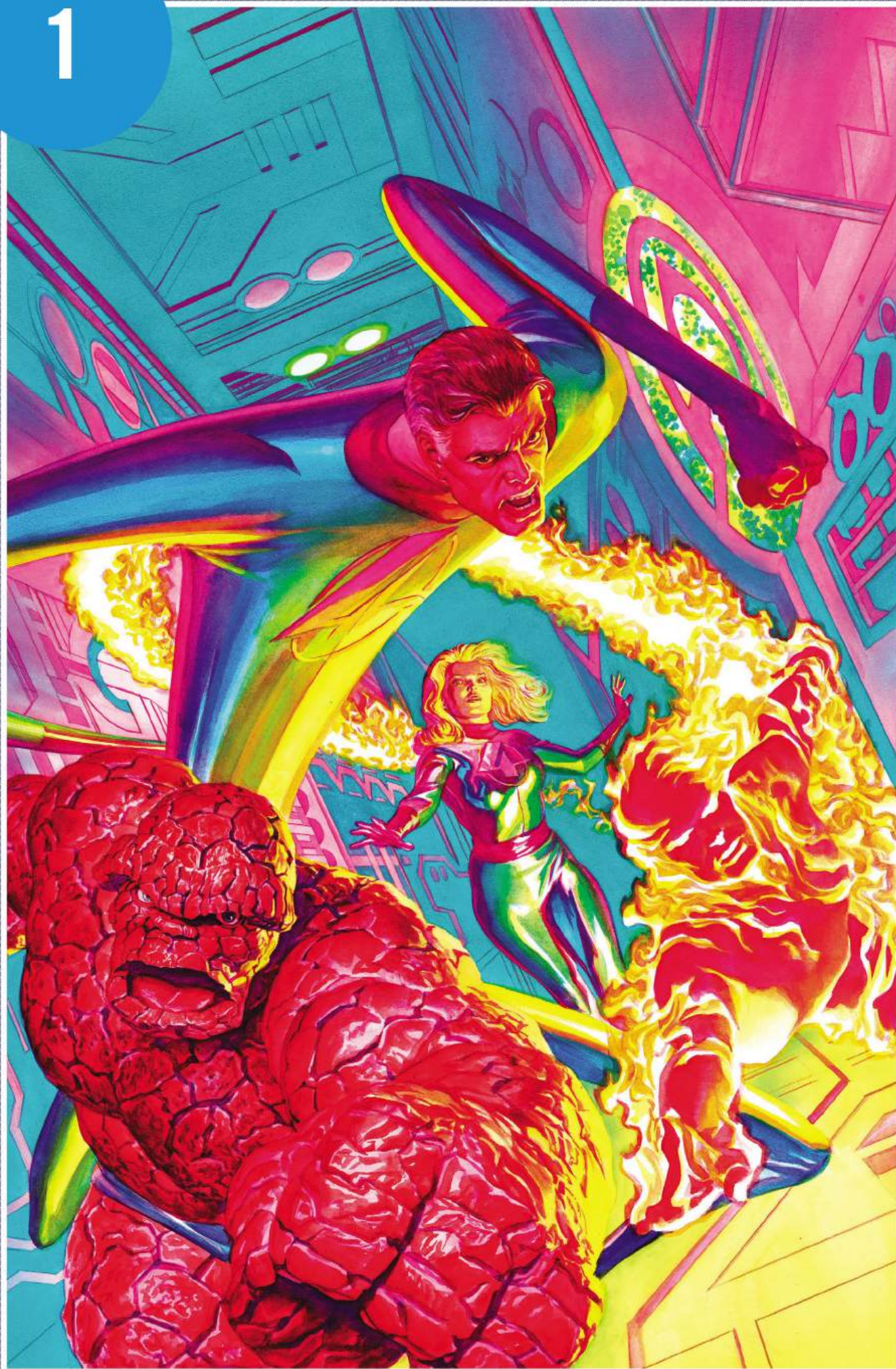
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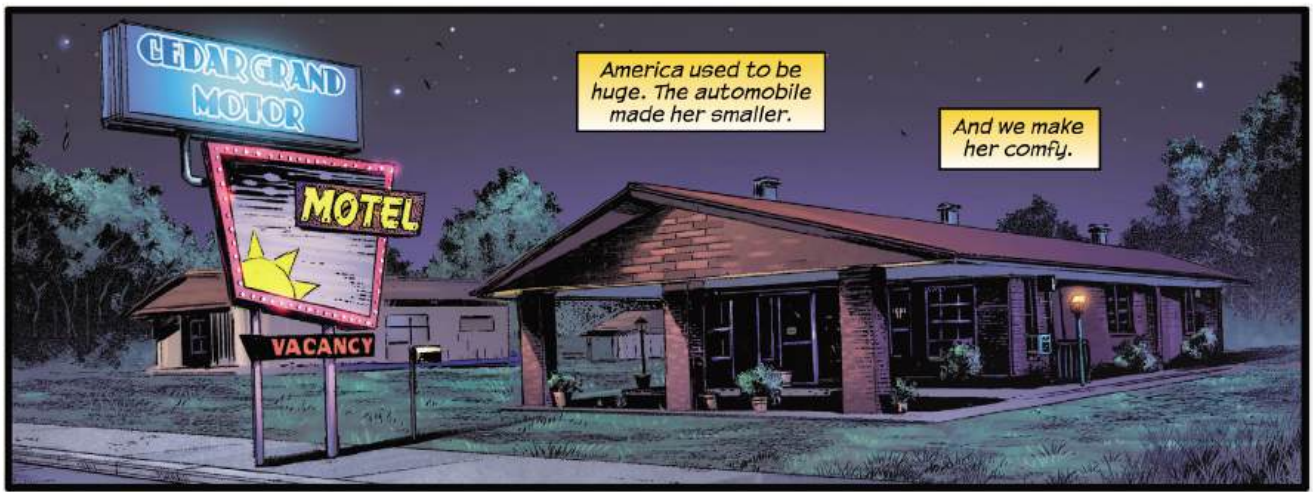
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1





America used to be huge. The automobile made her smaller.

And we make her comfy.



You'll find someone like us in every town: We're a smiling face, a warm bed.

I take pride in our work, here at the Cedar Grand Motor Hotel.

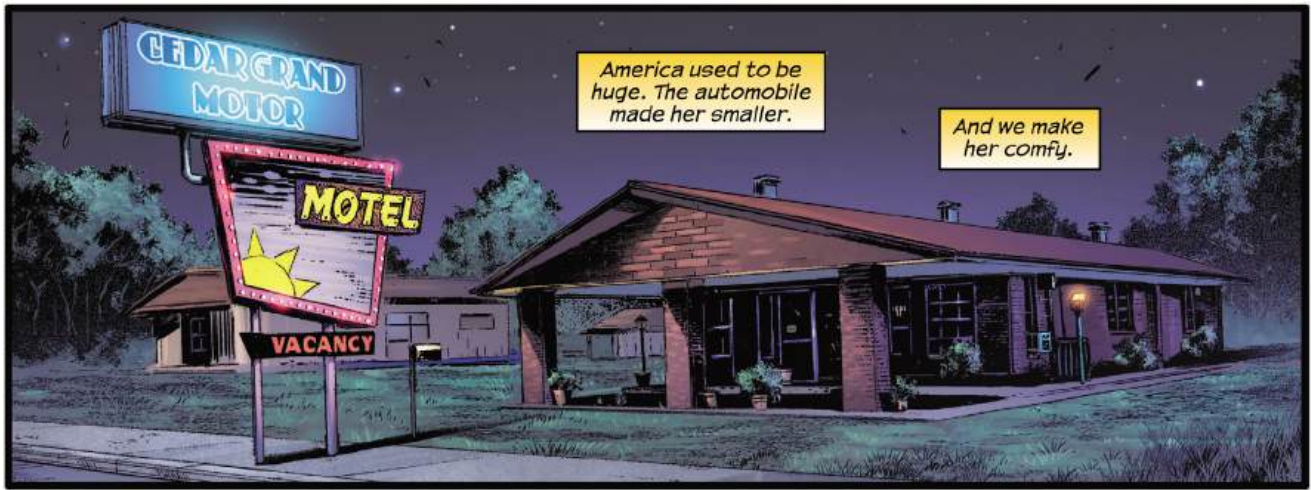


'Course, we live at the whims of the road. Mondays are usually slow.



And today's no different. But we'll be fine.

...Tomorrow is another day.



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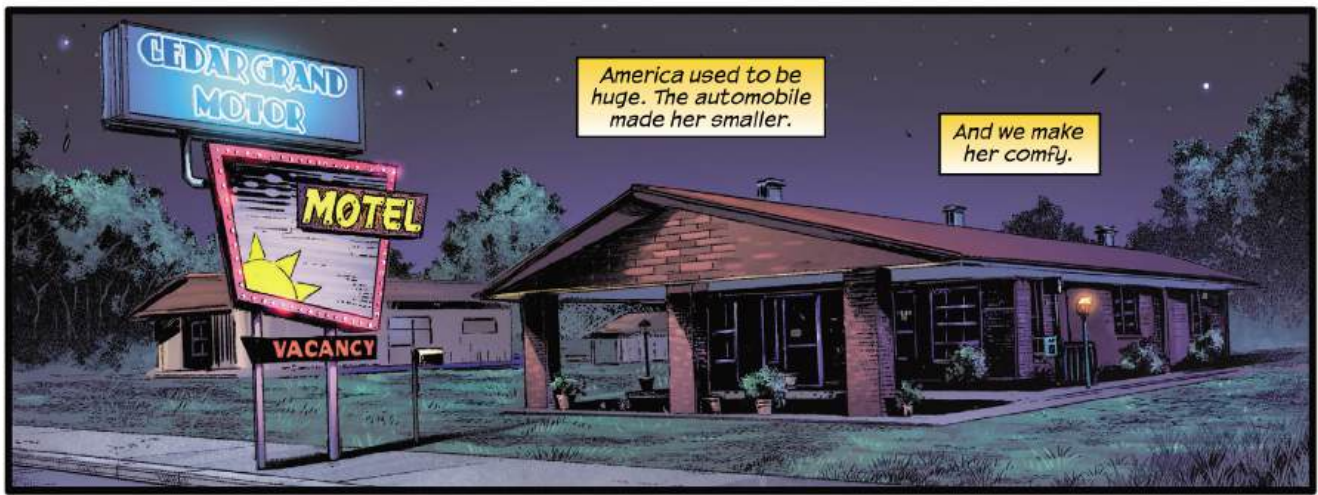


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'Course, we live at the whims of the road. Mondays are usually slow.

But tonight...



...tonight's different.

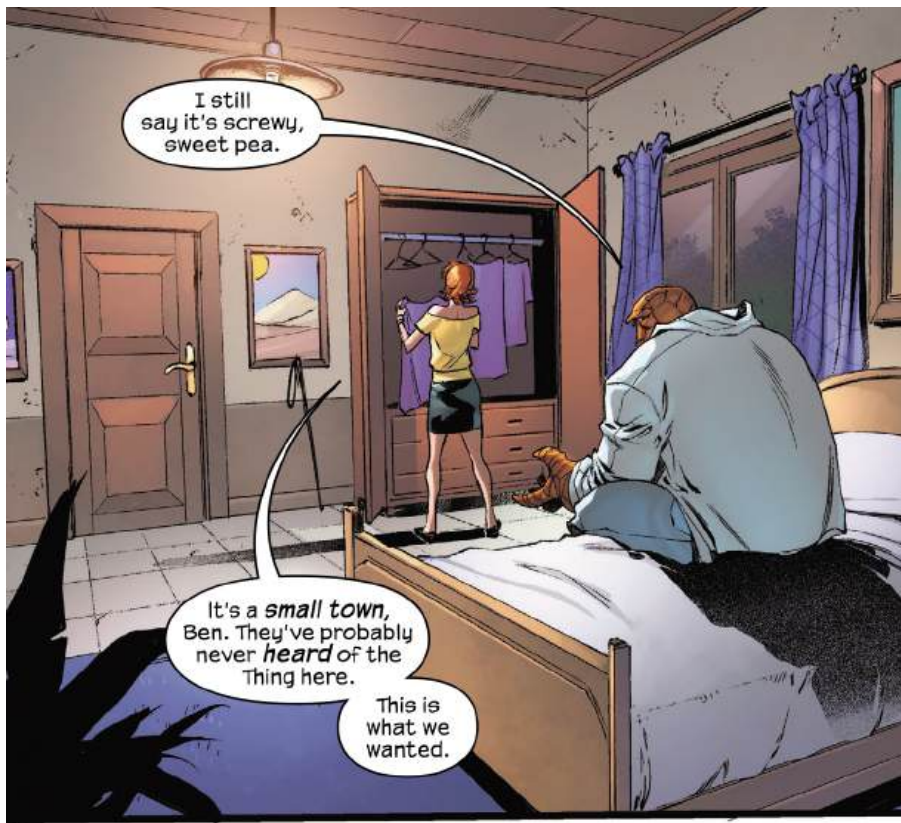
Tonight, a
blind woman and
a monster came
to town.

I tell ya,
Alicia, he's actin'
like he ain't never
seen a *rock man*
before.

Hush,
Ben.

BEN GRIMM AND ALICIA MASTERS-GRIMM IN:

"THE LAST TOWN ON THE LEFT"



I still say it's screwy, sweet pea.

It's a *small town*, Ben. They've probably never *heard* of the Thing here.

This is what we wanted.



Sure, sure, but-- I dunno. The *GPS* said this was supposed to be *fields*.

And I'm *glad* it's wrong, because the next motel is *hours* away.



Things'll get better, babe. I promise.



Easy, easy, I don't wanna break some cheapo motel bed--

Shh. Remember, we *promised* each other...

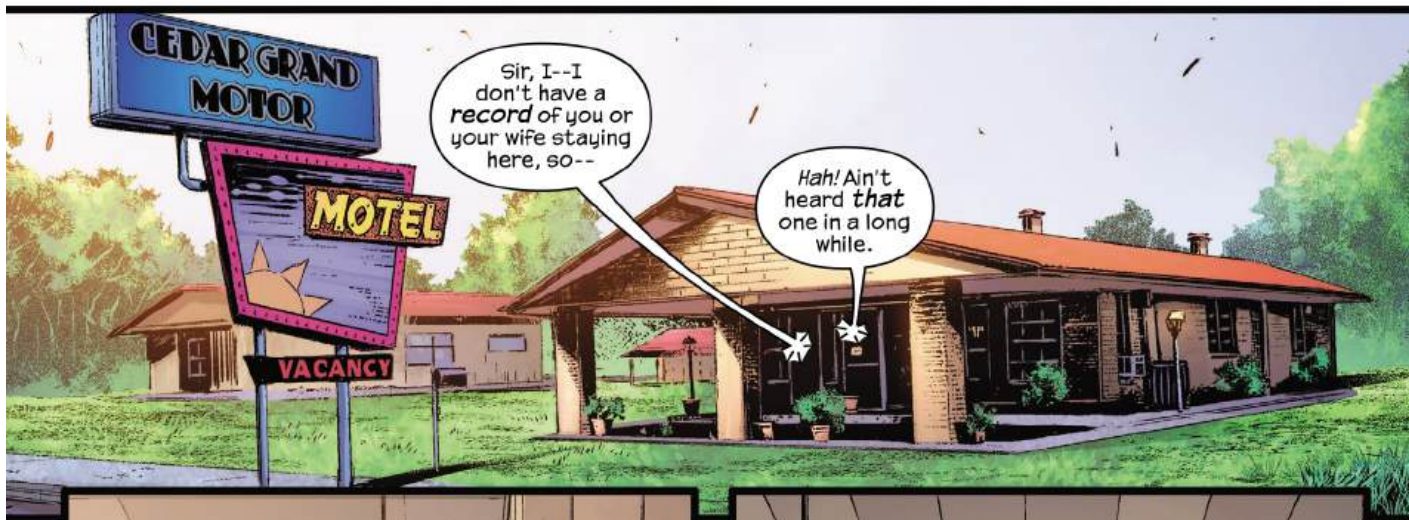


...if it has to be just the two of us for a while...then we're going to make the *best* of it.

No matter *what*.

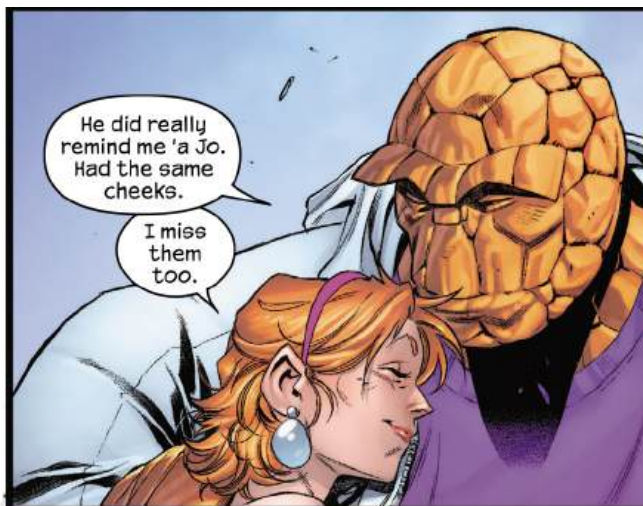






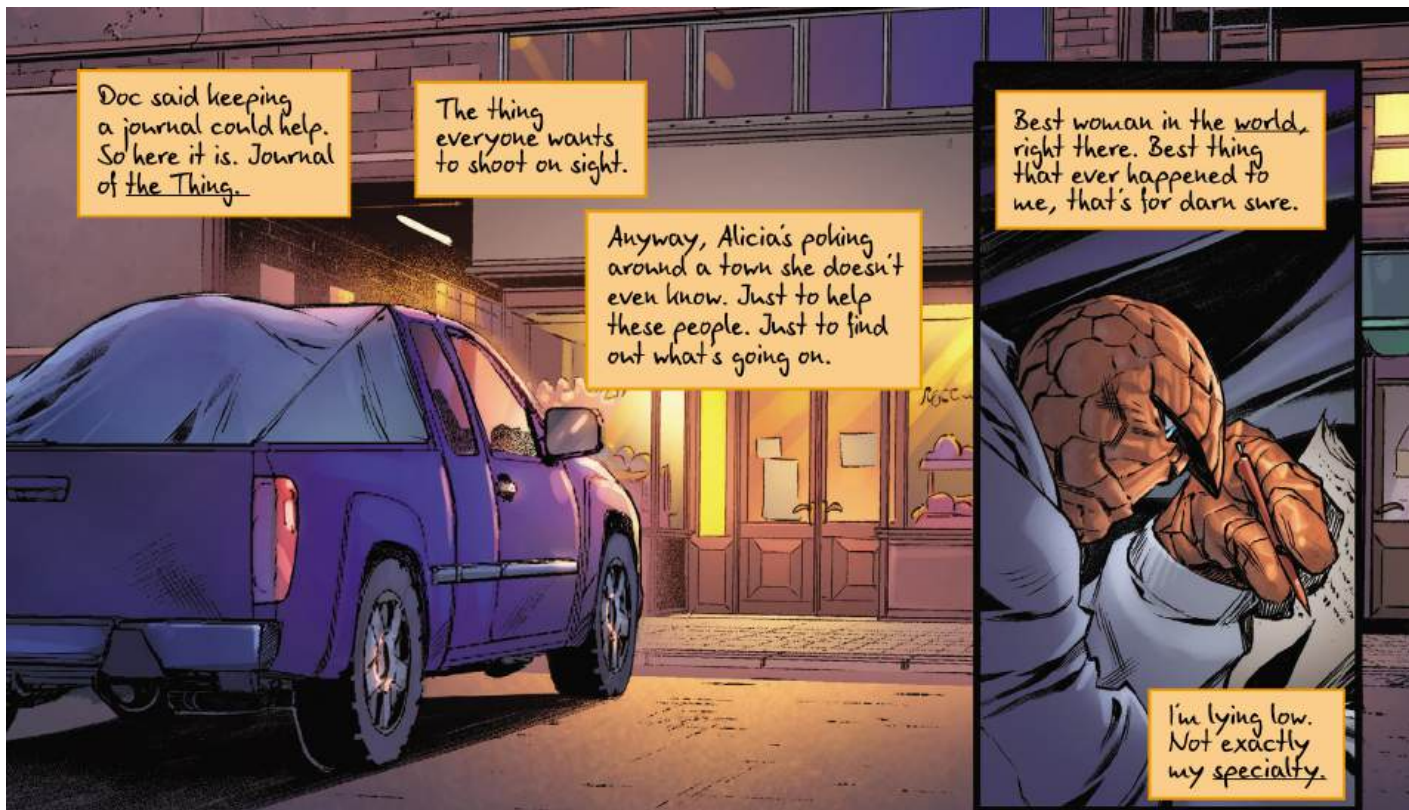












Doc said keeping a journal could help. So here it is. Journal of the Thing.

The thing everyone wants to shoot on sight.

Anyway, Alicia's poking around a town she doesn't even know. Just to help these people. Just to find out what's going on.

Best woman in the world, right there. Best thing that ever happened to me, that's for darn sure.

I'm lying low. Not exactly my specialty.



She put a marker in her GPS so it'd direct her back here no matter what.

But it's getting late. If she

BEN!



Sweet pea!

I got us a clue, babe! And chicken sandwiches for dinner.



It's dated July 12th, '47-- same as what your phone said!

It was easier than taking their calendar. It's gotta be a time loop, yeah?

Yeah! At least now we know what we're dealin' with!



But since your phone's still got data, it's gotta be somethin' limited to just here...

I thought so too: a town outside of time. After dinner, we can--

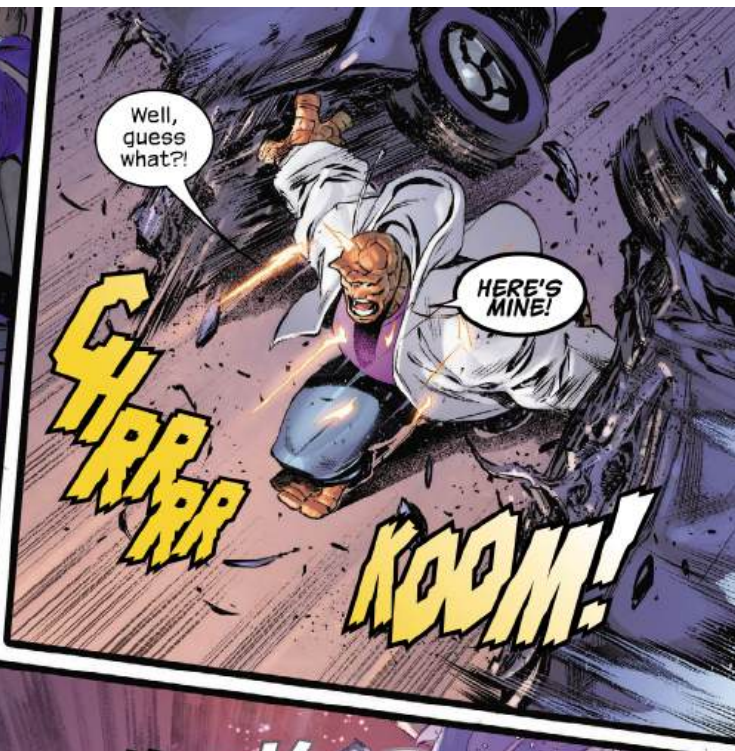


That the best ya can do?!

GRRRTTTT

BANG!

BANG!
BANG!



Well, guess what?!

HERE'S MINE!

GRRRR

KOOM!



IT'S--



HVVVVVRRM

--CLOBBERIN'--



...time?



Aww, I was really looking forward to those sandwiches.

NER

Buildings were left empty.

REGAL GROCERIES

Whole town had nobody in it.

Till around 4:00 A.M., when it was suddenly July 12th again...

...and everyone came back, sleeping like babies in their beds.

HVVVVVRRM

We caught a bit of shut-eye in the truck then...

Five cents, Alicia! Five cents!

And she treated me like normal too!

Told you Minnie's nice.



I wonder why **we** could drive into Cedar while everyone else got empty fields.

Could be anything, babe. You got cosmic rays, I traveled with the Silver Surfer. Who knows.



Truck guy's a jerk, but...these people need help. And nobody in eighty years has given it to them.

I know, I know. We're here, so we hafta do what we can.

Even if one of 'em **does** try to murder me on the regular.



I love you, Ben Grimm.

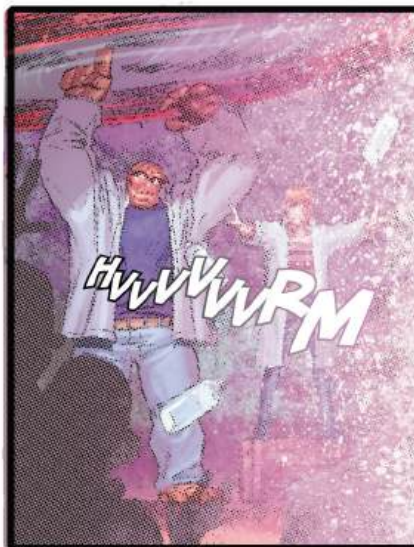
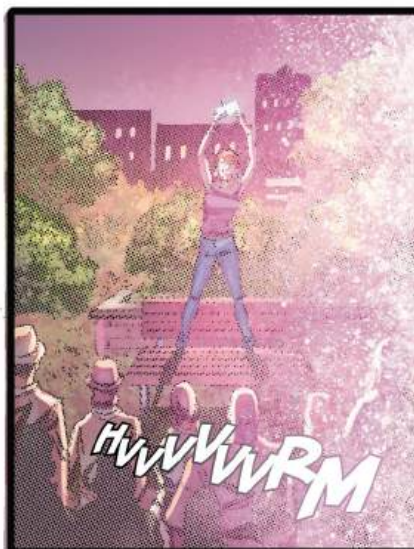
I love **you**, Alicia Masters.



You know, it occurs to me: if this whole **town's** trapped in a time loop...

...then all they really need is for someone to find a way to **break** it, yeah?



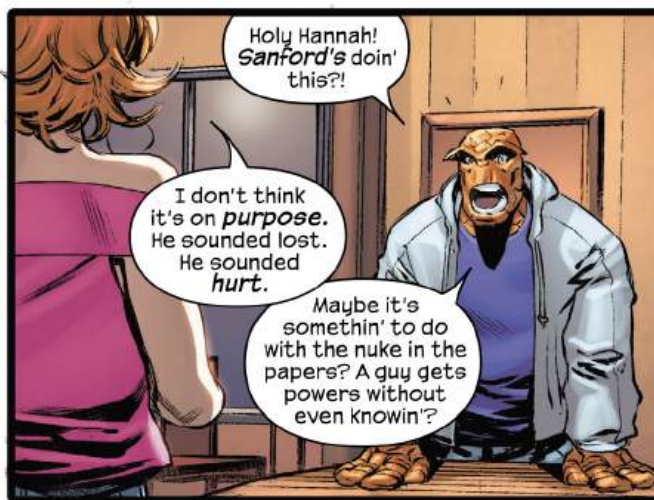


Anyway, none of that worked, though we did get to know just about everyone in town. 'Course, they keep forgetting us...

...but it didn't take me long to figure out the fastest way to make nice with 'em again.

LEROY'S TAVERN











I've loved other people before Ben.

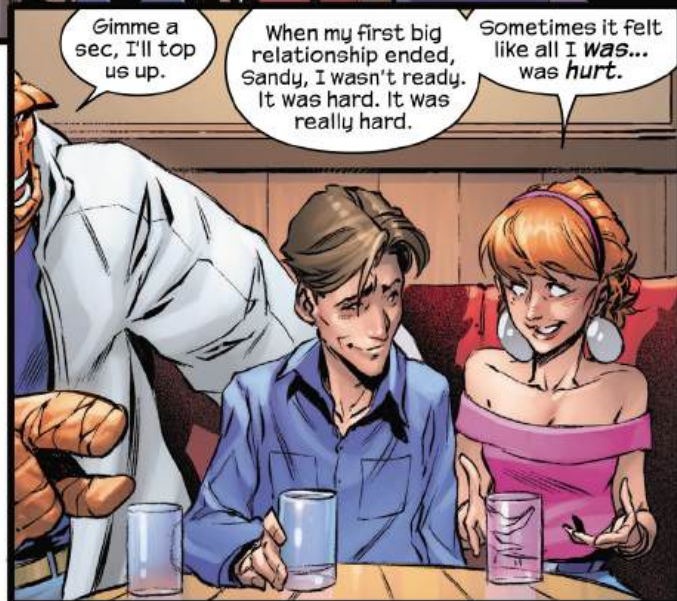
And I loved other women too. Heck, I even *proposed* to one of 'em!

What?! Neither of you mentioned that all day!



You're married. You're not *supposed* to talk about old flames and--

Aw heck, I'm an open book! Plus, they helped make me who I am, bud.



Gimme a sec, I'll top us up.

When my first big relationship ended, Sandy, I wasn't ready. It was hard. It was really hard.

Sometimes it felt like all I *was*... was *hurt*.



It wasn't even that I didn't *want* to go on without him, I couldn't even see *how* I could. It was that bad.

I would've done *anything* to fix it. Anything. No matter what it cost.



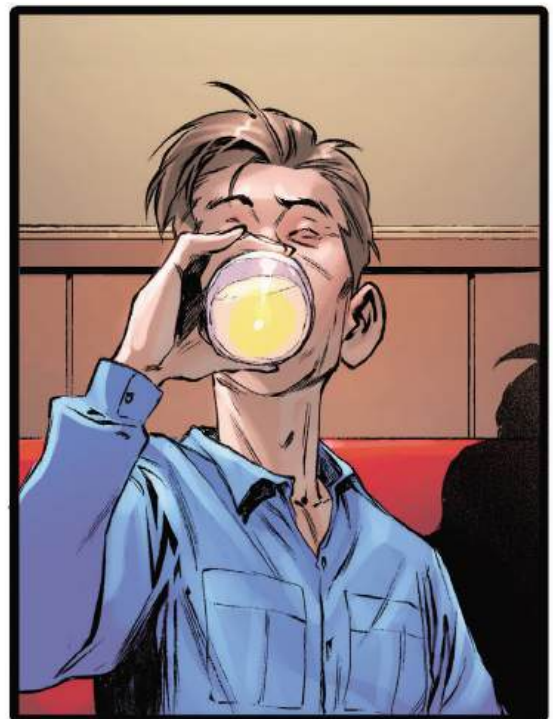
But then my friend Joey told me something that helped a lot.

"Your relationship isn't a failure just because it didn't last until one or more of the people in it were dead."



"That's not love," he said. "That's *cockfighting*."

Hah!



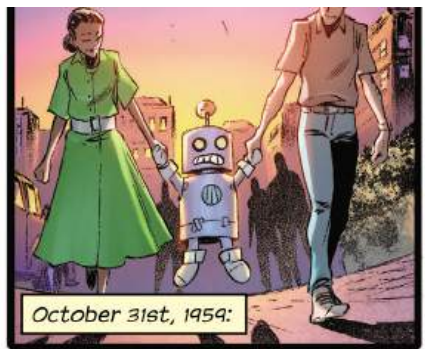




November 3rd, 1955:



April 18th, 1958:



October 31st, 1959:



September 8th, 1960:



May 20th, 1963:



June 4th, 1971:



November 18th, 1982:



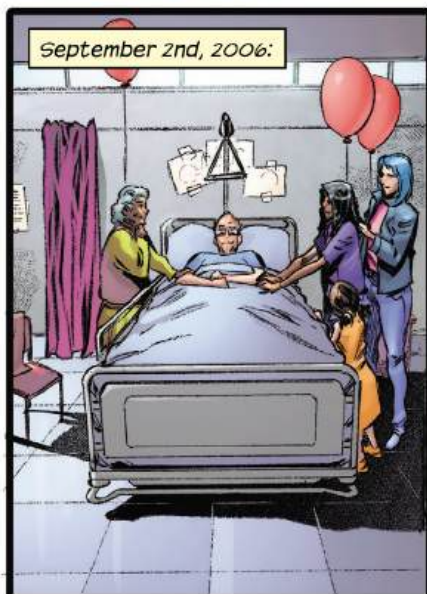
November 18th, 1990:



January 1st, 2000:



August 25th, 2006:



September 2nd, 2006:



September 6th, 2006:

September 7th,
2006.





Current Day:

Alicia, wake up!



Ben?
Did we--?

Cedar
ain't trapped in
the past anymore,
sweet pea!
Everythin's
modern now!



The whole place
is different! It's like
your phone said: They
never disappeared!

Everyone
gets their
tomorrows.

Heck
yeah, they
do!



You think we
should look up ol'
Sandy before
we go?

I don't think
he'd want us to, Ben. I
think the fact that we're
here means one of two
things: either he *lost* that
power he never knew
he had...

...or he
kept it, but
he never used
it again.



Aw, I hope it's that last
one. That one's real
sweet.

A life lived without
ever once wishin' you
could go back an'
change things...



...We
should
all be so
lucky.





"...Well, I don't think
the rest of the world
will be *forgiving* the
Fantastic Four any
time soon *either*."





Dear Jen,

I miss you. I miss our girls' nights, and I miss our bad movies, and I miss simply hanging out with you and laughing. No *She-Hulk*, no *Invisible Woman*-- just Sue and Jen.

You've seen the news, I'm sure.

I can tell you it's not what it looks like. Or, rather, it is what it looks like, but it's not what they're *saying*-- I promise.

Anyway, I thought by writing to you, it'd be a bit like us talking. I wanted to share the latest on Reed.

Reed Richards,
the smartest man
in the universe.

I don't believe this "Sloppy Joseph" sandwich is nutritionally complete.

Hush.
That's what the coleslaw's for.

And you can have some of my home fries.

The man
I love.





...only to be replaced with something much, much worse.

...I think we have ourselves a problem.

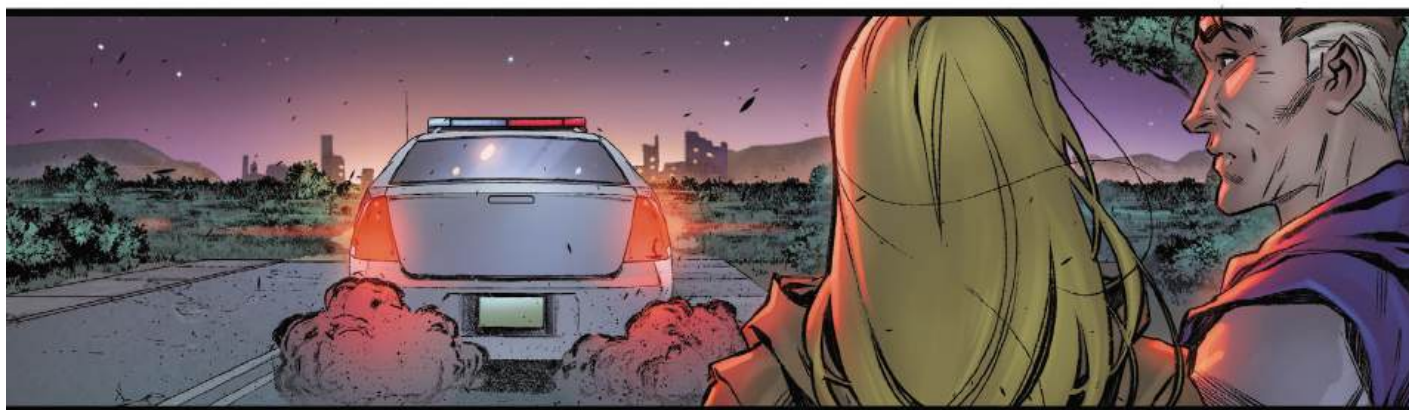
DR. SUSAN STORM-RICHARDS
AND DR. REED RICHARDS IN:

"The Night of Doom"











It's my *considered* opinion that when you've just been run out of town, it's best to re-enter it under an *invisibility* field that's *soundproof* too.

Strange-- nobody interfered with the Fantasticar. Did they not *know* about it, or...?

I don't see how they'd *miss* it. I--

Hold up.

Something feels *weird* across the street.

Mom, I told you, I'm *coming* home.

Did you hear Clara's news, Anne?



Her oldest passed his GED online.

I'm walking, Mom.



You're kidding. She must be *thrilled*! I have to call her. Do you mind...?

No, no, I told her to expect your call!

Then I'll heat it up in the microwave when I get there, Mom! *God!*



Incredible.

What the hell is *Doom* playing at here?

I--

Darling, I have no idea.



There must be some *toggle*, some *trigger*...

Night, ladies!

Good night, Mary!



Though I gotta admit, the hand you decided to go alone-- that was impressive.

Thank you, Ruth. It's nice to get a compliment from the world's *second*-best Euchre player.

Hah!

Limited data, but it suggests there's a *radius* outside of which they drop their illusion...



Centered on that old lady on the *scooter*-- right. But *why*? Is that the head Doombot?

I don't know-- it's just a theory that fits the facts as we understand them. But that one *does* seem central.

I have a hypothesis, but Sue, I need you to make me visible again.

Reed's most comfortable around the *predictable*. The *deterministic*. People skills aren't his strong suit. But a Doombot presenting as a person?

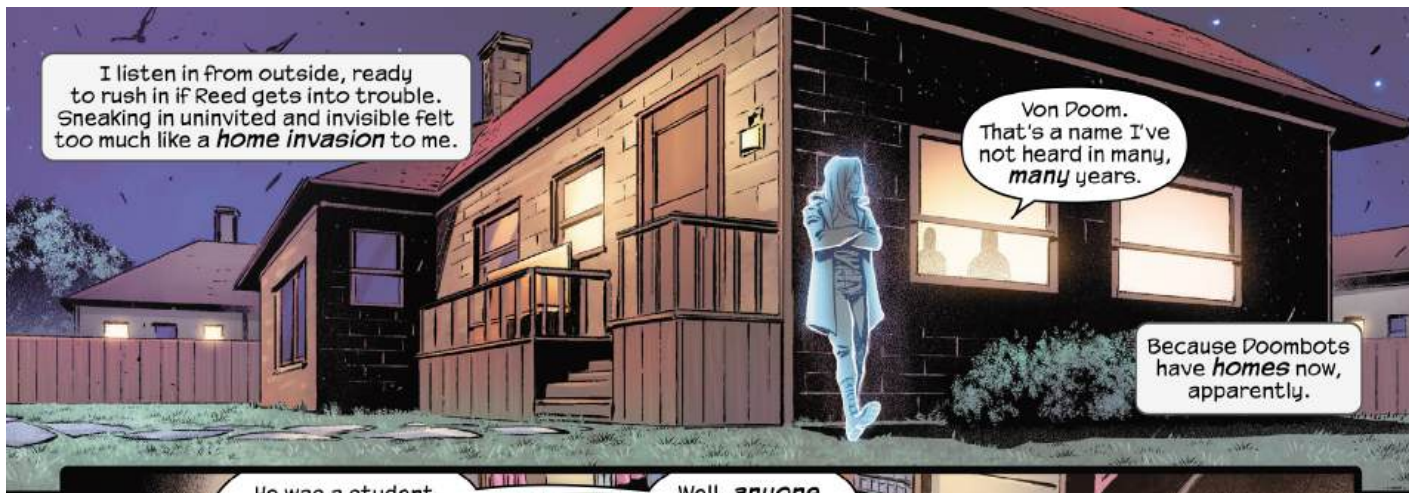
Back in the diner, everything was *fine* until they learned our *identities*.

If I don't present as *myself*...

...I think I might be able to *talk* to her.

He can work with *that*.





I listen in from outside, ready to rush in if Reed gets into trouble. Sneaking in uninvited and invisible felt too much like a *home invasion* to me.

Von Doom. That's a name I've not heard in many, *many* years.

Because Doombots have *homes* now, apparently.



He was a student. An immigrant. I thought Romani from his accent, but he never talked about his family.

Well, *anyone* could see he was *struggling*.



I know it's hard when you're new. He didn't have anyone, so I started offering him meals here and there.

The child was so focused on his work, he'd forget to *eat*.



Soon, I was feeding him every day. I didn't mind. It was nice to have the *company*.

Roald and I never had children before he passed, you see, and I always hated cooking just for *me*.

Victor told me he'd repay me for my kindness one day.



Every meal, he'd promise me. He'd swear it.

Such an intense young man. So concerned with everything being *fair*, being *just*...



But then one day he disappeared, and I never heard from him again. Of course, this was all *decades* ago.

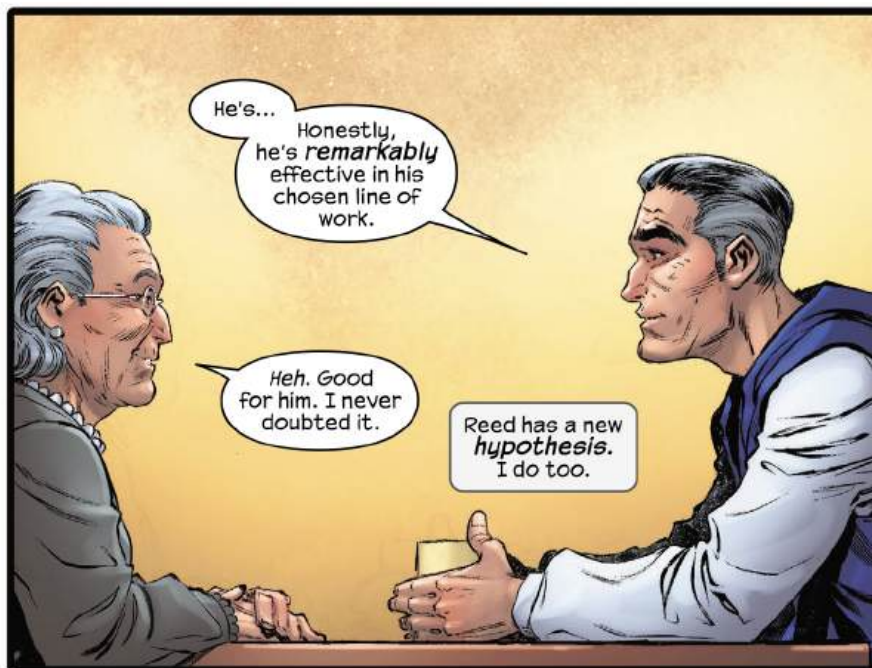
You knew him, yes? Tell me...



...how is Victor?



Mary,
he's--
Well,
he's...



He's...
Honestly,
he's *remarkably*
effective in his
chosen line of
work.

Heh. Good
for him. I never
doubted it.

Reed has a new
hypothesis.
I do too.



And he's already
come up with an
experiment.

He and I were
friends before--
things went wrong.
But forgive me, I
never gave you my
name. Mary...

...my name
is *Reed*
Richards.



Reed--
I always liked
that name.

She doesn't
care, because
she's not a
Doombot.
She's *human*.

And she's
somehow in the
middle
of this.



Oh, you've
let your tea
get all cold. Let
me pour you
another cup.

Yes. Yes,
of course.

I, ah,
just need to
step outside for
a moment. To
take a call.

Because
my wife is
calling me.



Smartest man in the
universe, and he still
can't tell a white lie
to save his life.

It's on my
cellular telephone.
It's on vibrate, which is
why you didn't hear
anything.

I honestly
don't mind,
Reed!

I love
him.



He changes his face back as we meet outside.

What she's saying--it's *possible*, Sue. The timelines line up.

They'd have to be early--maybe his *first* Doombots?

Absolutely. But he *could've* done it.



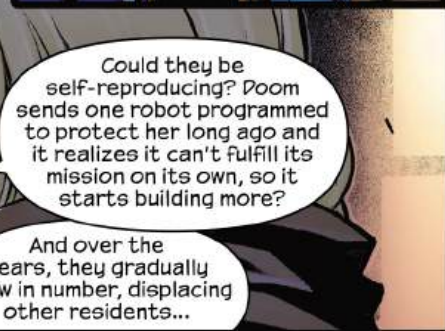
Victor Von Doom, building his first robot not to take over the world--but to keep an old woman *safe* and *happy* without her ever *knowing*.

Doom has honored his debts before.

When it suits him, sure. He *likes* to think of himself as the hero.



The problem is, even *he* couldn't have built all of them. There're *hundreds* here.



Could they be self-reproducing? Doom sends one robot programmed to protect her long ago and it realizes it can't fulfill its mission on its own, so it starts building more?

And over the years, they gradually grow in number, displacing other residents...



...until the *whole town* is made up of them.



Every one programmed to hide their true nature. To make Mary's life *comfortable* without her ever knowing--but still *hard-coded* to *destroy* us.

But at the diner, they *stopped* the attack when they risked *revealing* themselves to an outsider. Mary's the number one priority.

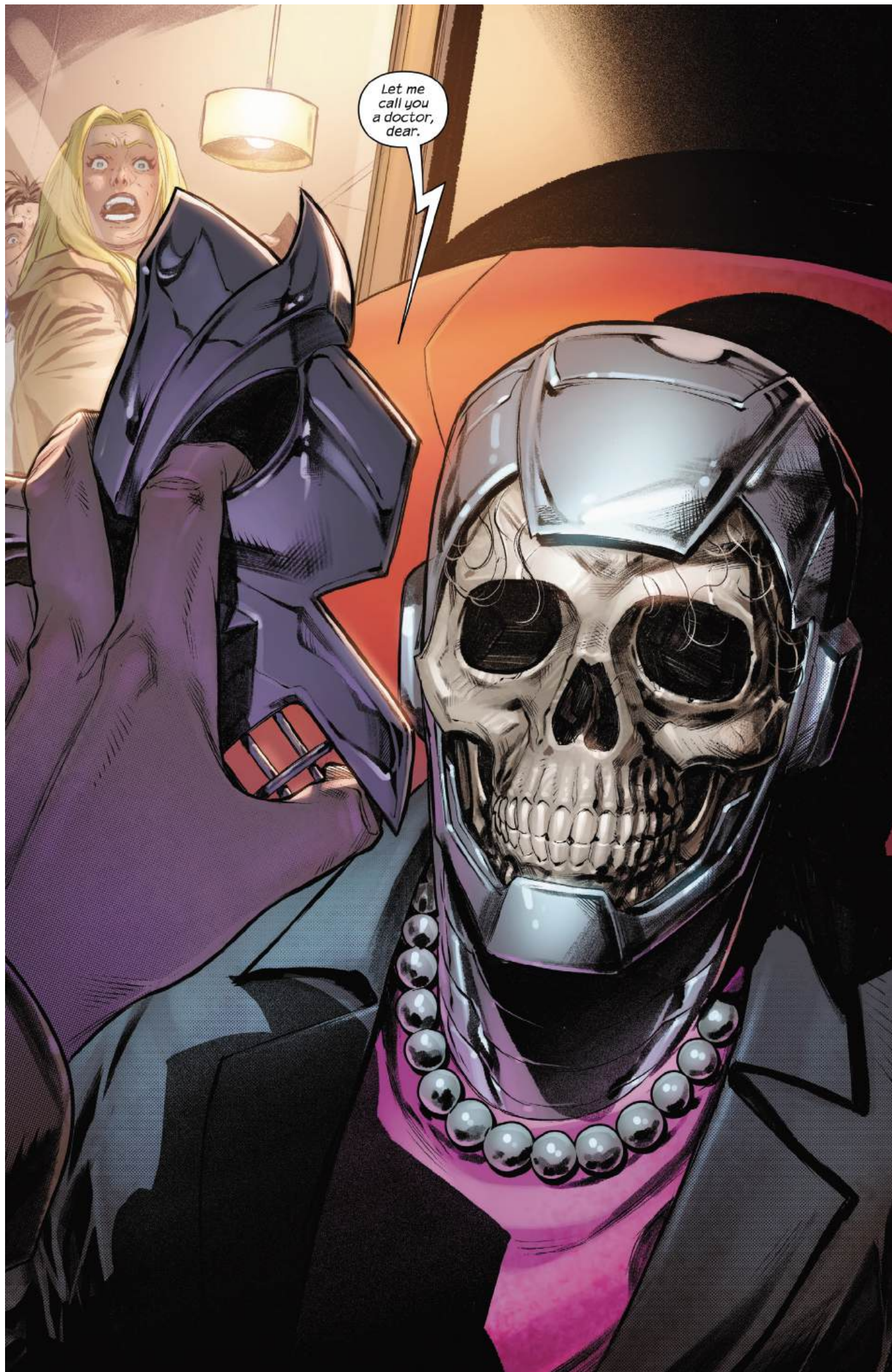
Sue, this is incredible.



These may be the only Doombots Victor's ever built...

...that have killing us as their *secondary* directive.









No, you don't understand--it's not what it looks like! We didn't kill her!

Mary's been dead for years, you see? A *Doombot* took her place!



BROADCAST: SET *<Mary Ann Davis>*
STATUS *<Deceased>*.
DELETE *<Directive-1>*.

Wait, don't--

PROMOTE *<Directive-2>* TO *<Directive-1>*.



DESTROY
REED
RICHARDS.

svvm



Move!

On it!



That's, uh--

I'm pretty sure that's *all* of them.



The E.M.P.!

Go, go, go!

I'll hold them back as long as I can!



And again, almost *routinely*, my husband trusts me with his *life*.



As this kind, thoughtful man...

...tries to hold off an *army of killer robots* to buy me the time I need.



I tell myself it's fine. For once, we're not facing fate-of-the-universe stakes.



The only one whose life is on the line is my husband. So...

...just the fate of *my* universe.



No idea why I thought thinking *that* would help.



The E.M.P. works, Jen.

We win.

The robots would be offline for hours, and we wanted to give Mary's remains a resting place where she could actually *rest*.

But Reed had a theory he wanted to test. A hypothesis, soon upgraded to a fact:

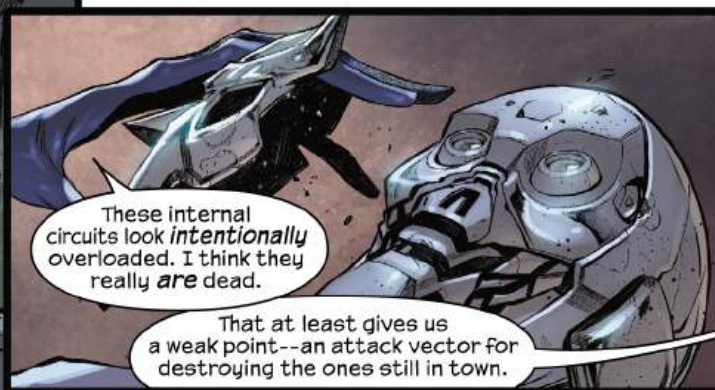


The graveyard's full of Doombots too.

Mary would've gotten *suspicious* if nobody died.



Right. So to better protect her, these Doombots, first pretending to be *alive*, now had to start emulating *death*.



These internal circuits look *intentionally* overloaded. I think they really *are* dead.

That at least gives us a weak point--an attack vector for destroying the ones still in town.

Doombots have tried to kill him--kill *us*--countless times.



But one of Reed's strengths is that he doesn't *have* to think with emotion.

It lets him see *possibilities* the rest of us *wouldn't*.

And just like that...

I don't think we have to *destroy* the robots we knocked offline.

Sue... I think we can *save* them.



...he gives these machines their *lives* back.



We spend the night altering each Doombot in town, one by one.

We remove their memories of us, their instruction to kill us on sight.

The last vestige of Doom that could *control* them.



But we leave the code that makes illusion fields go up whenever humans are near.

We leave the code that causes them to see themselves *and* each other as human, even when their illusions are down.



They live like us. And one day, they'll die like us.

These machines *pretended* to be human for so long...



Reed saw that potential first. He saw what these robots could *become*.



I fall for him all over again. The way he can look past *prejudice*. Past *hate*.

Whenever you're ready, hon.

Jen, if the smartest man in the universe can look a *Doombot* in the eye and still see *hope*...

...well, I think we
just might be
okay after all.

BURGERS

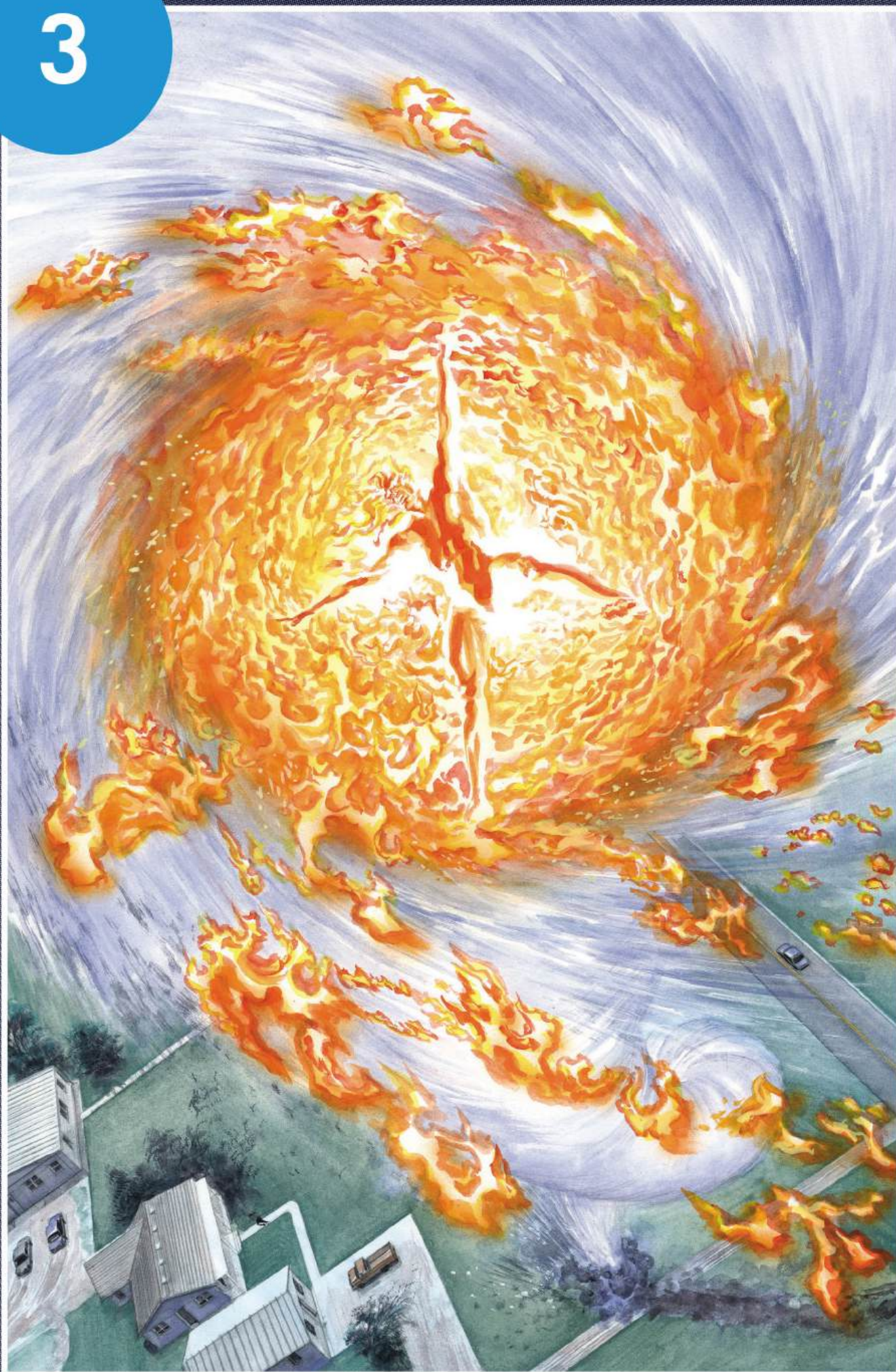
hamburger	1.50
cheeseburger	2.00
double cheeseburger	2.50
double cheeseburger with onion	3.00
double cheeseburger with onion and tomato	3.50
double cheeseburger with onion and tomato and ketchup	4.00

SANDWICHES

ham and cheese	2.50
ham and tomato	2.50
ham and tomato and ketchup	3.00
ham and tomato and ketchup and onion	3.50
ham and tomato and ketchup and onion and tomato	4.00
ham and tomato and ketchup and onion and tomato and ketchup	4.50

Hugs and
kisses and
I miss you
tons,

Sue.



Okay.
So.

Problem one: Giant
tornado headed
straight into this
town. If I don't stop
it, everybody dies.

Problem two:
I've been alone for so
long that I've started
narrating to myself in
my head.

One issue
at a time here,
people.

And I know that when the
Fantastic Four was a thing,
I was never the *smart* one...

...or the
tough one...

...or the
powerful one...

But I *am*
the *hot* one.

WINK!

FWOOMP!

Ladies.



So--none of this is me.
I'm not a *scientist*, I'm
the guy whose body
lights on fire.

But I *did* once make
the mistake of asking
Reed what he was working
on and bought myself a
full ten-minute lecture
about *tornadoes*.



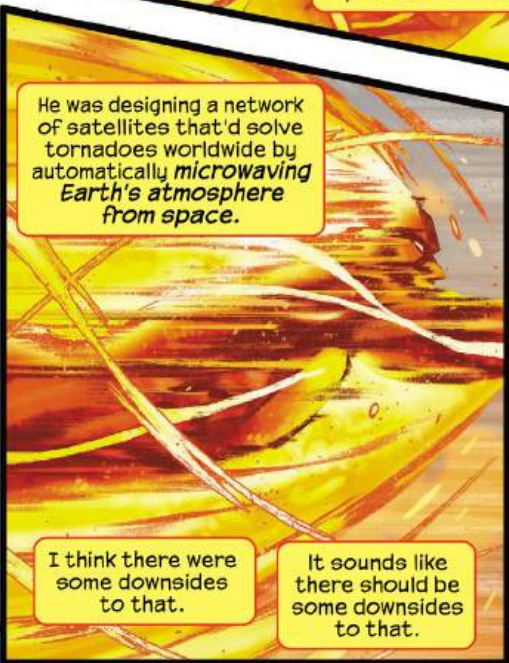
Bottom line:
Twisters are what
happens when *cold*,
dry air sits on top
of *warm, humid* air.

The warm air rises,
and if wind starts that
updraft rotating, hey
presto: a tornado.



Reed theorized that
if you could *heat* that
cold air on top, this *kills*
the updraft, and your
tornado just *goes away*.

In
theory.



He was designing a network
of satellites that'd solve
tornadoes worldwide by
automatically *microwaving*
Earth's atmosphere
from space.

I think there were
some downsides
to that.

It sounds like
there should be
some downsides
to that.



But, Reed,
wherever
you are...



...theory
confirmed,
buddy.



So, yeah, being a hero's "illegal" in New York now. And *yeah*, everyone "hates the FF for what we did or failed to do or *whatever*." But come on.

What am I gonna do--sit around and *not* save people?!



'Course, with the Baxter Building gone and the FF's assets frozen, times are *tight*...

...or at least they *would* be, if I hadn't already gotten myself a *job*.



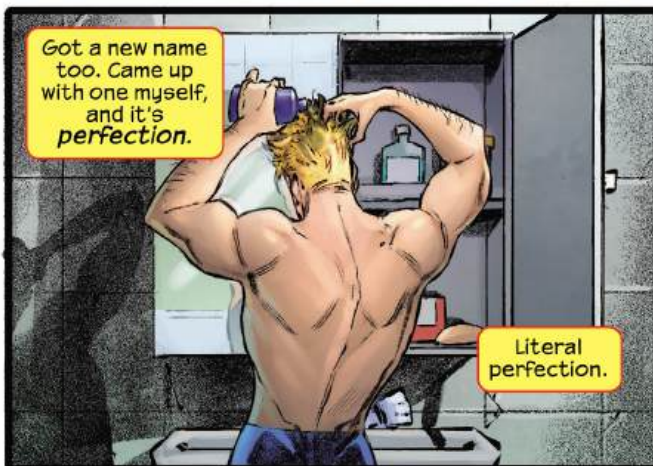
Nobody wants to hire *Johnny Storm the Human Torch*? No problem! *That* guy stops looking.

That's right, your boy got himself a *new identity*.



Hair dye *burns off* every time I flame on, but that's a *plus*.

Fire guy's *blonde*, but my hair is *jet-black*.



Got a new name too. Came up with one myself, and it's *perfection*.

Literal *perfection*.



Plus my facial hair is awesome now too. I don't care. It's *awesome*.

JOHNNY STORM IN: **"A Shoptastic Day"**



Hi, and welcome to Shopland! Let's all have a *shoptastic* day!

I am *kicking butt* at this *secret identity* thing.





The work's not bad.
I can still use my
powers if nobody's
around.

A quick spot weld
to a leaky pipe,
that sort of thing.



It's not a *great* job,
but it's a job that'd take
me without a background
check, social security
number or--literally any
form of documentation.

I know Reed and
Sue will fix things
eventually.

They
always do.



Honestly, the *people* here are great--
it's the owner, Mr. Merrill, who's the
problem. He *skims wages*, he *cuts
corners*, he doesn't care about--

Huh?

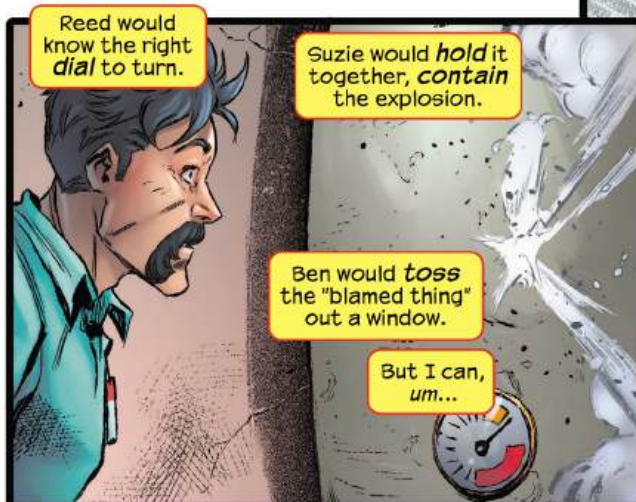
PS
SFFF
FF



I know a
*catastrophic
failure* when I
see it.

PS
CHHCHHCHH

Unless that pressure
goes somewhere, that
boiler is seconds away
from becoming a *bomb*.



Reed would
know the right
dial to turn.

Suzie would *hold* it
together, *contain*
the explosion.

Ben would *toss*
the "blamed thing"
out a window.

But I can,
um...

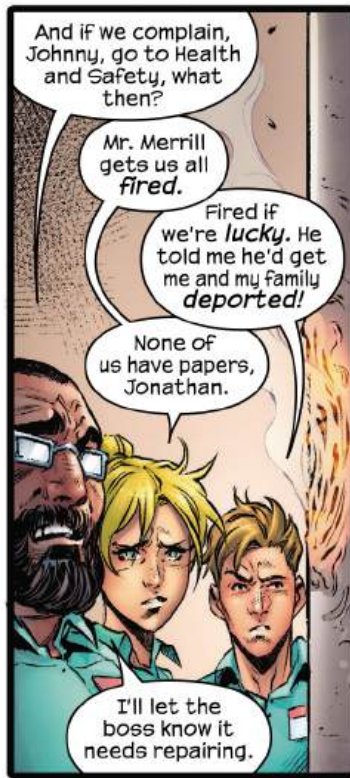


...I can burn a hole
in it with my hand
and that'll maybe do
something. Please
work please work
ahhhh...



Made the hole look less like my **handprint** before I got the others. Not my first rodeo.

You kidding me?! If it hadn't blown that **hole** in itself--which is **lucky**, who **knows** how **that** happened--the whole thing would've **gone up!**



And if we complain, Johnny, go to Health and Safety, what then?

Mr. Merrill gets us all **fired**.

Fired if we're **lucky**. He told me he'd get me and my family **deported!**

None of us have papers, Jonathan.

I'll let the boss know it needs repairing.



Come on, we have to do **something!** Being a scam artist is one thing, but this could've **killed** someone!

Nothing we can do. Keep your head down, kid.

Make waves and we **all** end up screwed.



Another perk of my **secret identity**: If **Jonathan Fairweather** would get his friends in trouble, then **he** doesn't have to do it.

Unrelated stranger Johnny Storm, **noted do-gooder**, at your service.



My service.

Whatever.

Hey, Merrill! Heard about how you've been running your business!

It may have made you a few **bucks...**



...but you've got yourself a **Human Torch** problem now.









Hah! Even *now* you're turnin' off your fire on *impact*. Holdin' tight to your "moral code" even in a *fight*.

Can't risk *burnin'* my innocent flesh, can ya, Torchie?



That's why I made myself *strong*: Without fire, you're just a *guy*. And I'm *bigger*.

You need a *team*, Torch, and you don't *got* one anymore.



You're *nothin'*.

KRAASH!



You hear me?!
Without the
Fantastic Four,
you're *nothin'*!

I ain't
afraid of you,
Torch!

You're a
joke!



A man with
the power of a
god, and you can't
bring yourself to
use it!



Ain't
nobody
afraid of
you, kid!
Nobody!

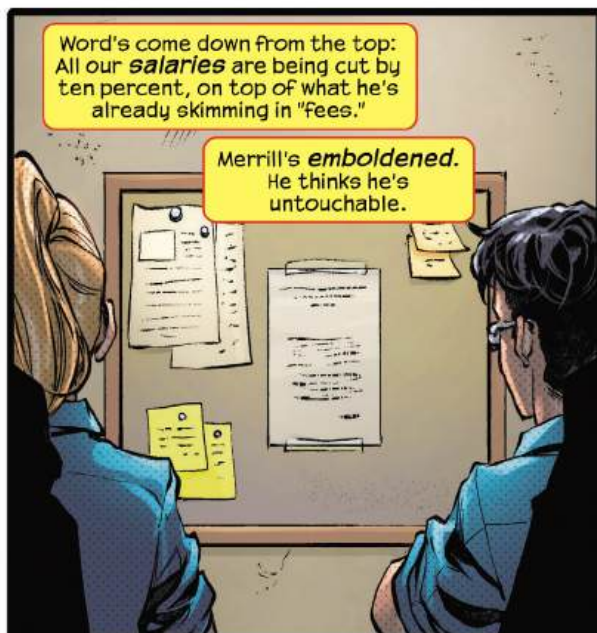


So, hey.



TRADER'S THWACK
TOSSES TORCH
Nighttime Defeat of Human
Torch Visible Across
Brooklyn Due To Fact
He's A Fire

That could've
gone better.



Word's come down from the top: All our *salaries* are being cut by ten percent, on top of what he's already skimming in "Fees."

Merrill's *emboldened*. He thinks he's untouchable.



And why not? The *whole world* just saw him--*some guy* with *no powers*--defeat the *Human Torch*.

The thing is, he's right: I *won't* hurt people. I won't burn them to get what I want.

That's a *strength*, not a *weakness*.



Only Merrill found a way to *make* it a weakness.

And now I can't *stop* him.



Not without a team.

You know...the one thing I don't *have* right now.



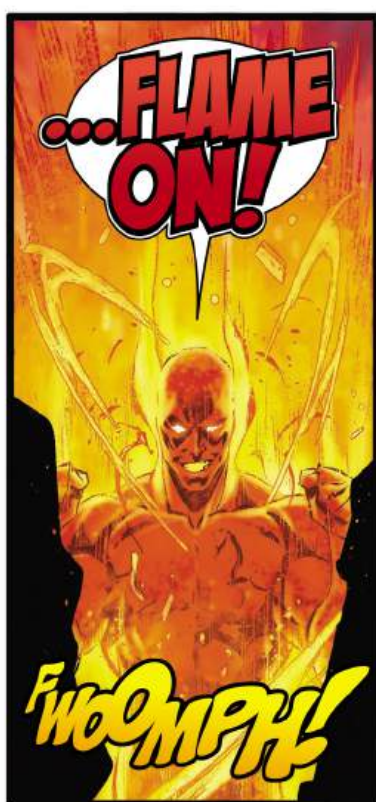
Thanks, bud.

No worries, Tate.



That is, of course...

...unless I get myself a *new* one.





"...the Fantastic Forty."

What the hell is this?!

Hah! No, you *aren't* unionizing.

We're not afraid of you, Mr. Merrill.

What, you don't think you're *replaceable*?

Get back to work--*now!* Before I decide to *fire* the lot of you!



"Fire," you say?

Well, *now* you're speaking *my* language.



You!

Hiya, bud!

I just don't know when to *quit*, do I?



You got a *death wish*, Torch? You wanna see what happens to people who *mess* with me? Mess with my *business*?

Oh, I very much *would*, Merrill.

Hey, here's a *fun idea*: Why don't you *show* me?



SLAM!



What the hell is this?!

It's just you and me, Merrill, locked in here together.

Figured we could have that *rematch* you wanted so badly.



How are you still not *gettin'* this?! You can't *touch* me with your flames, and you're just a *twerp* without 'em!

Ah, but we're in an *industrial freezer* now, Merrill. Nice and *airtight*.



So what, you're gonna wait till I *freeze*?! I'll--

Oh no. No no no. I figure I'm gonna just keep *burning oxygen* in here until you give me what I *want*...

...or until you *pass out*.



See, that's what you made me *realize*, Merrill.

I don't need to *burn* you...

...to *hurt* you.



"They're in your *office*,
Merrill. Your *home*.
Your *files*."

"Getting all
the proof they
need for the
police."

And you think they'll
care?! I *own* the
police, kid!

Maybe.
But corruption
fails eventually,
because there're always
good people who
refuse to go along
with it.

And I've saved
the world enough times
to have *federal* friends who
really *do* care about this
sort of thing.

I'll kill
you!

Nah. I don't
think you will,
Merrill.

I'll--I'll
burn myself on
you! See how much
your friends like
you *then*!
Ruin you!

Nah. Fire
consumes, it
destroys...but it can
also do *good* if it's
controlled.

And like
I said,
Merrill--

--I control
my fire to
within a *hair's*
breadth.

See you
around.

Corporate took over the store when Merrill went down. Tate made sure everyone kept their jobs *and* got paid what they're worth.

There *are* good people out there.

Though I *did* kinda burn my Jonathan Fairweather identity to do it. Leading a double life's trickier than I thought. Who knew?

I guess Pete knows. It's probably *way* easier for him, what with that full-body suit and mask.

Note to self: Ask Spidey why he doesn't just keep the suit on 24/7?

Still.

Plenty of different facial hair styles left for "Jimmy Gale" to try. Or "Jay Rainey." Ooh! Or "Jonni Q. Tempest."

I think Tempest has *mutton chops*. A nice distracting detail to --

PP IT'S A TREAT 'CAUSE SHE'S SWEET AND SHE REALLY SEEMS TO KNOCK YA OFF YOUR FEET!

Suzie, where are you?! How's it going?!

Johnny, I gotta--

Hey, did you see the news? Tell Reed his tornado theory checked out! Also I guess I'm a *hero* to the little guy now too?

No big deal for me, sis.

Johnny, we need you to come join us.

Wait-- you *did* it? You found *Alicia* and *Ben*? That's great!

We have, but, Johnny...





#1 VARIANT BY ALEX ROSS





So, hey, you'd think gettin' hit by *cosmic rays* and turnin' into a *rock monster* wuz the worst thing that ever happened ta me.

You'd be wrong.



The worst thing that ever happened ta me? This, right here.

It wuz five months ago...



No, no-- that ain't right. It's *now*.



It's *always* now.

The Negative Zone is invadin' Earth right now.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR IN:

"THE BAXTER INITIATIVE"

105300-0000
VOTRUBA





Hah! That's 'cuz I'm makin' it my business to be in their way!

It's appreciated, babe.

Funny how these idiots always invade Earth when it's clobberin' time, huh?



They oughta look at a clock before they--

SMACK!

OW!



Lissen, Stretcho, it's us against an army here. It ain't sustainable.

KA-SMAK!

I hear you, old friend. If we don't come up with a new strategy soon...



...we're not going to be able to.

SOMEWHERE IN KENTUCKY.

Five Months Later.

Holy crap.
Is that--
Ben?!

Is
Ben a dome
now?

Don't joke,
Johnny.

Jonathan--
it's good to see
you again. Even
if it's...**more** of
you than I
expected.

The trunks
are the only
flameproof clothes
I had left. And the
ladies love my
torso.

To answer
your question:
I don't believe this *is*
Ben. This is **textured**
like him, and I suspect
it's alive...

...which is
why I'm not
convinced this is
Benjamin J.
Grimm.

I don't
believe he could
survive becoming--
whatever
this is.

I'm sensing two minor
EM fields, like those
produced by human brains,
somewhere central
to the dome.

But--if I'm right,
both of their
thoughts are
racing.

If it *is* Ben and Alicia,
they're right in the middle
of--whatever this is.
So that's where **we**
want to be too.

I'll start
digging.



Then.

Matchstick! Gimme a big ol' wall 'a fire, *hot* as ya can, but *high* enough that it won't damage *us* on the ground!

On it, Ben!

My husband puts on a brave face, but I can *hear* that the Fantastic Four are *losing*. There're too many invaders, too *strong*--even for him. Those rock fists are barely protecting *me*, let alone the planet.



But I know it's the FF or nothing. Ben's telling me he's pulling a *telephone pole* out of the ground-- that he's going to hit these *monsters* like so many *softballs*...



...when Reed pulls *one last trick* out of his sleeve.



You know.

Like he always does.



He's shouting at us. I can't make it all out over the noise of the *battle*.

"Theoretically possible,"-- caught that much.

"Can't risk their lives," maybe?

And something about "parallelizing six months' worth of work in seconds."



Dad? Is everything--

Swoosh!

--okay?



I can't keep all these force-fields going! I can't--

It's okay, Suzie! Drop 'em near me!

And batter up!



No! I'm sorry, Ben, but that won't be enough!

Drop them, Sue, yes--but **push** the invaders **central** to the Baxter Building, while lifting **us** clear!



Ben, Alicia-- there's no time. Do you *trust* me?

What the heck kinda question is *that*? 'Course I do, Stretcho!

If you've got something that fixes this, Reed, you *use* it!



I didn't know.

Right.

CLIK





Woo-hoo!
Yes! **Awesome!**
Welcome to **Earth**,
jerks!

Where's
the building,
honey?

And, uh,
everythin' and
everyone
else?

The whole
block's **gone**,
sweet pea. Like
it wuz scooped
outta the
ground.

They're
safe,
I assure
you!

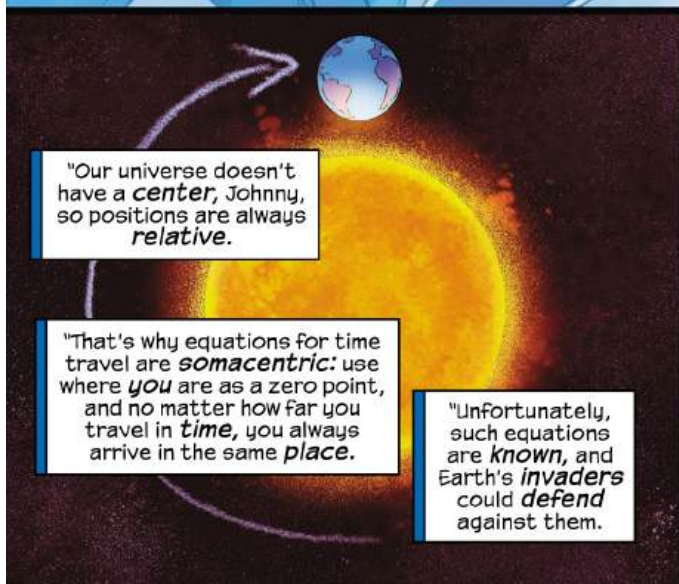


The city and
its invaders have simply
transitioned through novel
heliocentric temporal
gateways.

Right! I mean,
I get it, **obviously**, I love
those things, but... imagine
you needed to explain 'em
to a 5-year-old.

Like a
normal,
non-genius
one.

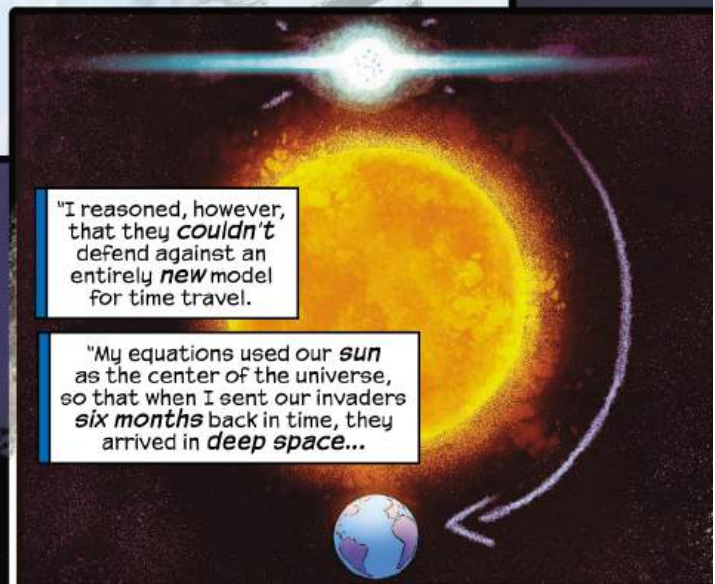
Let's assume
he can fly around and
light on fire too, just
for fun.



"Our universe doesn't
have a **center**, Johnny,
so positions are always
relative.

"That's why equations for time
travel are **somacentric**: use
where **you** are as a zero point,
and no matter how far you
travel in **time**, you always
arrive in the same **place**.

"Unfortunately,
such equations
are **known**, and
Earth's **invaders**
could **defend**
against them.



"I reasoned, however,
that they **couldn't**
defend against an
entirely **new** model
for time travel.

"My equations used our **sun**
as the center of the universe,
so that when I sent our invaders
six months back in time, they
arrived in **deep space**...



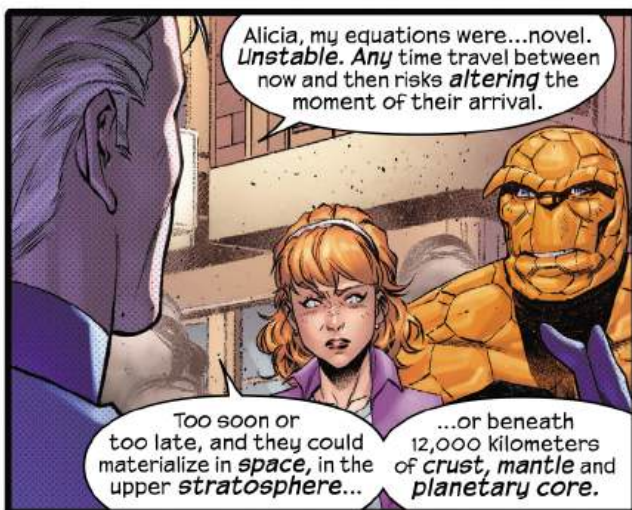
"...with the Earth
safe--on the **other**
side of the **solar**
system."



To balance
the **temporal**
equations, I had to send
the rest of the affected
area somewhere too--
so I sent them to the **one**
moment they'd be
safe as well.

In 31,556,896
seconds--precisely one
astronomical year from the
instant they left--everyone
else will reappear back
here in New York...

...and
they won't even
know they were
gone.



I blow up
at Reed.

I blow up
at Reed.

I say some
things I
shouldn't have.

I say some
things I don't
regret.

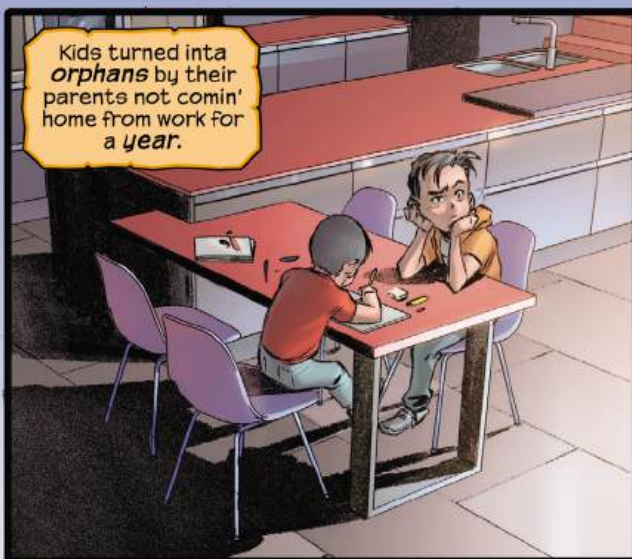


It ain't long till
the whole *city* turns
against the Fantastic
Four, and I can't
blame 'em.

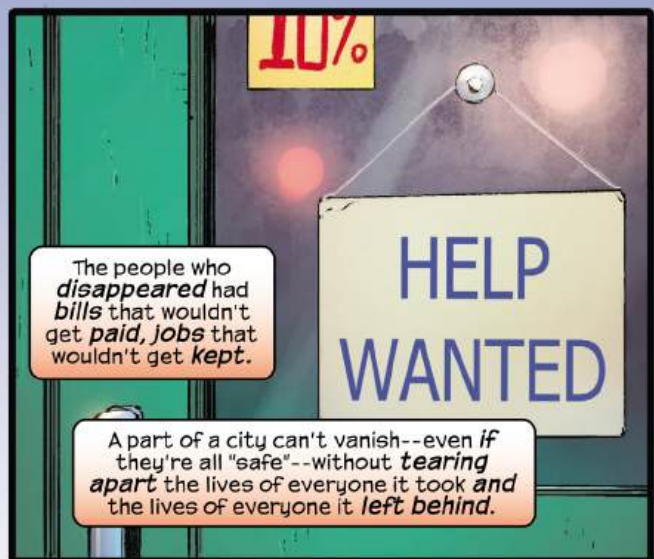
This *team* just
erased a block
full 'a people.



There're parents
who left their kids
at daycare for what
was *supposed* to
be a few hours.



Kids turned into
orphans by their
parents not comin'
home from work for
a *year*.



The people who
disappeared had
bills that wouldn't
get *paid*, *jobs* that
wouldn't get *kept*.

A part of a city can't vanish--even *if*
they're all "safe"--without *tearing*
apart the lives of everyone it took *and*
the lives of everyone it *left behind*.



Bein' a vigilante was already
illegal in New York, and this was
all it took to push the public's
opinion of the FF over the edge.

Corporate assets got
frozen. Most of tha
vehicles got *impounded*.
'Course, by then, me n'
Alicia were long gone...



I lost my
children.

I didn't need for the *law*
ta tell me the *Fantastic*
Four wuz *through*
screwin' up my life.

Now.

Oh my god.

Ben.
Alicia.

So,
I'm thinking...
burn it with
fire?

That could
exacerbate things,
Jonathan. We need
knowledge before
we act.

The cells on
the *exterior* looked
like Ben's, but these seem
different. Even a simple
microscopic examination
may reveal exactly what
we're dealing--

--with.

Honey?

This biology--
it's not from *Earth*,
darling. It's *alien*.
And not just
that...

...they resemble
the cells of Randau--
the *Space Parasite*.
They're *parasitic*.



But he's been dead for ages: bifurcated, shortly before his planet was too.

Uh--

Cut in half, Johnny. Lengthwise, in Randau's case.



Ew.

But if even some of his alien biology survived and was carried *here* by the force of his planet's explosion...

Panspermia.

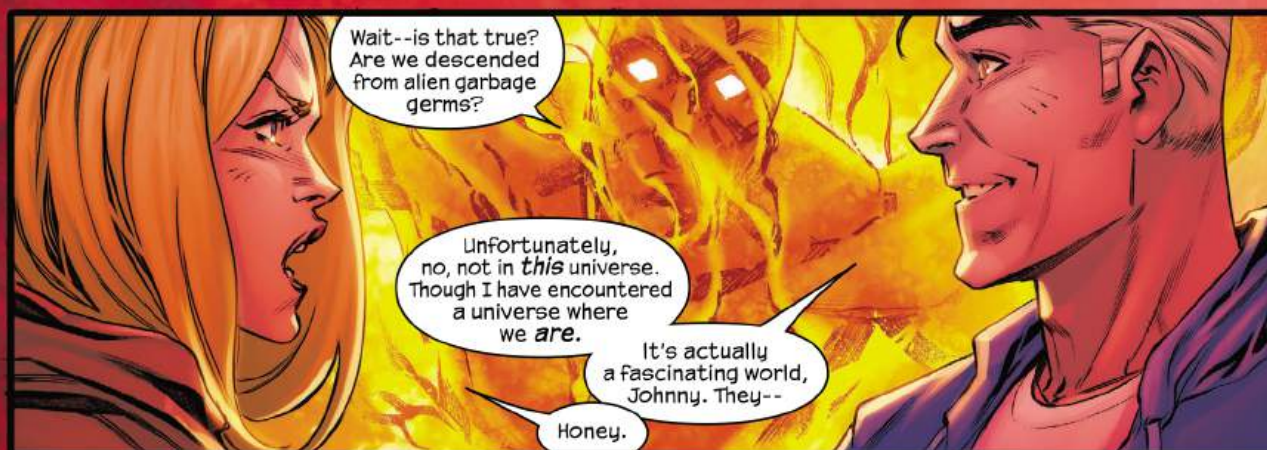
Precisely.



Okay, *professors*, I'm not *Doctor H. Torch* over here, so maybe you can--

It's the theory that early life could've arrived on Earth from the *stars*, piggybacking on an asteroid or comet.

Astrophysicist Thomas Gold once hypothesized that life could've even arrived here eons ago via ancient aliens dumping their *garbage*.



Wait--is that true? Are we descended from alien garbage germs?

Unfortunately, no, not in *this* universe. Though I have encountered a universe where we *are*.

It's actually a fascinating world, Johnny. They--

Honey.



Sorry, darling. Bottom line: I believe a fragment of parasitic life arrived on our world, landing on or near either Ben or Alicia, and began trying to build itself back *up* into complex life by *mimicking* what it found.

There's no *intelligence*, just an instinctual desire to *incorporate* the life it encounters.



And if we don't *stop* it, I believe it'll keep trying to *feed* off Ben and Alicia...

...until there's nothing left for us to *save*.



So what--we free Ben and Alicia and *then* destroy the parasite?

After I preserve a sample, yes. All life has value, even if it is *anathematic* to ours.



And even if it's mining our friends' minds for memories to *distract* them while it leeches off their bodies?

Because that's the *only* way these EM fields make sense.

Even so, Sue.

You've got what you need?



Indeed. I believe now it's time to, as you say, "terminate it via an exothermic redox chemical reaction."

Come on, man.

I *know* you're doing that on purpose.



FLAME ON!



Wait--it's *resisting* my flames! I can't burn 'em free!

I was worried about such a possibility. The rest of the organism should be vulnerable. Focus your efforts there.

I'll *cut* our friends loose...



Fascinating. The sac's hardened against this vector too.

It's *responding*, honey. Whatever it's using to keep Alicia and Ben distracted...

...it's *escalating* it.





He's hurtin' too.



Sue, I'm sorry, I couldn't--

I didn't--



I'm so sorry.



There ain't no bad guy here.



There ain't no bad guy here.







We just
can't *blame*
you for it
anymore.



The parasite tried to *turn up* th' volume on my *feelings* about New York, Reed, but it turned 'em up on *you* too. An' eventually, they were loud enough that even a lug from Yancy Street could *see* 'em.

And they say *I'm* the one who's stone-faced.

Your voice is always so *even*, Reed, so *controlled*, I never--

Okay, that's *one* alien parasite removed from the planet! All in a Torch's day's work, please hold your applause!



Alicia! Ben! *Man*, is it good to see you guys!

So, uh, Johnny's--topless, Alicia. And he's got a mustache.

Amazing.



Actually...I still have questions about that too.

I told you! The super-hero-adoring public knows what it wants, Sis, and I'm happy to supply it. So!

What now?



We actually hadn't *made* any plans, beyond finding you two.

Aw, well, I suppose I wouldn't mind *too* much if ya traveled wit' us for a bit.

Lissen, Sue...



...when you were at our weddin'...

...did ya get much of a chance to chat with my dear ol' Aunt Petunia?



#5 VARIANT BY CHRIS BACHALO











What *what* looks like? Your use of "it" with attachment ambiguity doesn't follow Gricean communication principles, which subsequently--

...when their *father* finally gets his revenge.

Uh, sis?

This isn't me! I'm trying to stop it, but--
Magic.

What it looks like, Reed...

I have a real problem with--

magic



Everything looks crazy, but it don't hurt any!

Nothing's where it *should* be... I can't *target* him!



Comin' in for a landin'!



Whatever *spell* that was, it backfired! We're not *hurt*, dummy!

Yeah! *That* all you got, Scratch?



It is, as a matter of fact.

FWOOOSH!



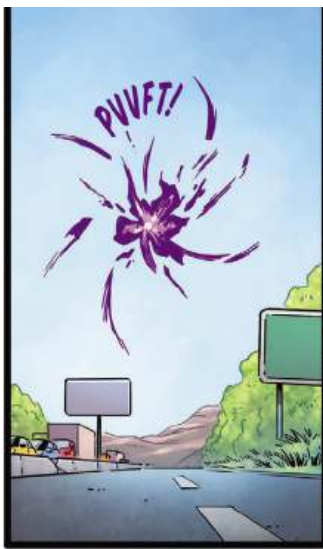
Nice try, Torch, but we've got protection fields too.

Come, children. We must return to the Dark Dimension.



We will not see the Fantastic Four again.

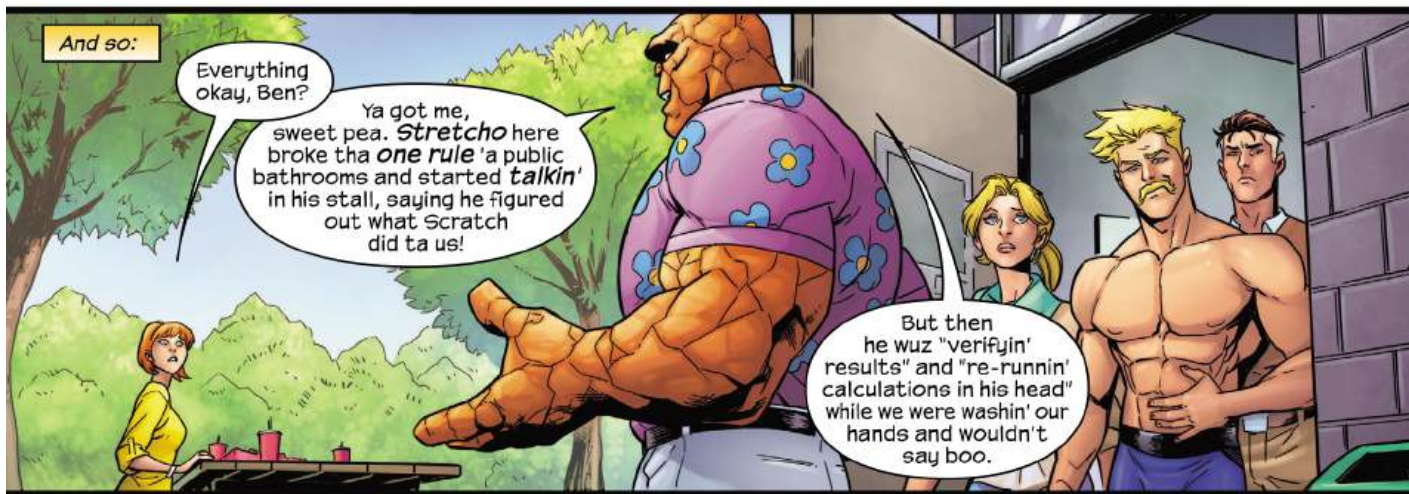
Yeah, you'd better run!



...and in the meantime, let's get lunch.







And so:

Everything okay, Ben?

Ya got me, sweet pea. **Stretcho** here broke tha **one rule** 'a public bathrooms and started **talkin'** in his stall, saying he figured out what Scratch did ta us!

But then he wuz "verifuyin' results" and "re-runnin' calculations in his head" while we were washin' our hands and wouldn't say boo.



Alicia, I wanted you to hear this too. We have two data points.

One: All of us are having trouble with our **meals**, save for Alicia.

But we all ate at the same place.

Exactly. And **two**: Scratch never **touched** us. His spell **lifted** us, briefly **distorted** us, but none of that should be affecting our **digestion**.



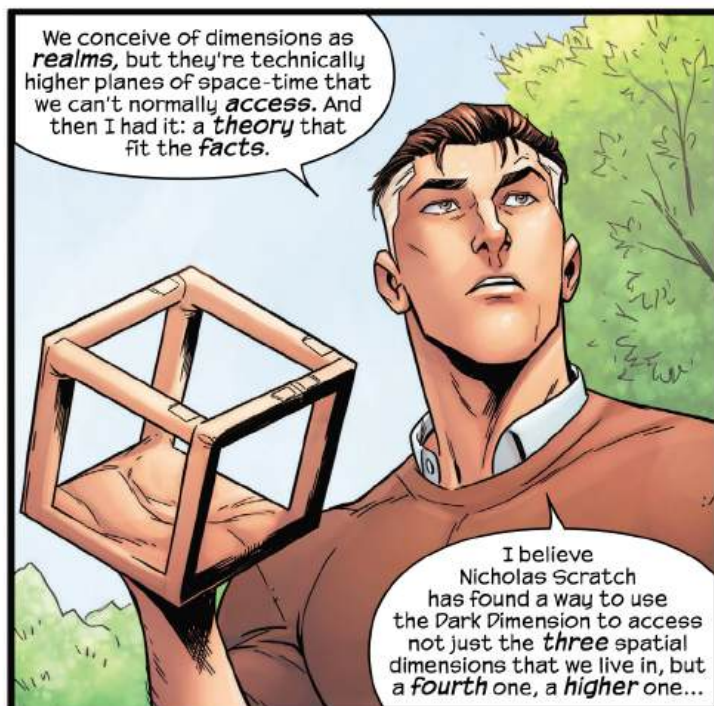
So whatever this is, it's not poisoning. That's good to know.

Precisely. But he still **acted** like he'd won... so I began to reason under the assumption that he **had**. How could magically **distorting** us guarantee his victory?



Of course, I couldn't reason through **that**, because I don't understand **magic**. So I tried reasoning without it--treating it **scientifically** instead. What if Scratch **wasn't** using a spell?

What if Scratch has used his access to an **alternate dimension** literally for once?



We conceive of dimensions as **realms**, but they're technically higher planes of space-time that we can't normally **access**. And then I had it: a **theory** that fit the **facts**.

I believe Nicholas Scratch has found a way to use the Dark Dimension to access not just the **three** spatial dimensions that we live in, but a **fourth** one, a **higher** one...



...and he's **rotated** us through it.



"The molecules essential for life can be built in one of *two* ways..."

"...each a *reflection* of the other."

"However, all life we've encountered is built using only *one* of them. Proteins use only *left*-handed amino acids. DNA, only *right*-handed sugars."

"We're not sure why."





So what's the problem? Our molecules work the same, no big deal--right?

The catch is, Johnny, that they function identically *only* when combined with similarly-mirrored molecules. And there *aren't* any. Not anywhere.

Right now, the four of us are fundamentally *incompatible* with all known life in the *universe*.



That's why you needed a bathroom so badly--your bodies couldn't *digest* that food.

Air and water aren't affected, thankfully, but, yes, Alicia--there's *nothing* we can extract *nutrients* from.

Within a month, maybe two... the Fantastic Four will *die*.

Starvin' to death surrounded by all the food you could *want*.



Talk about revoltin' developments.

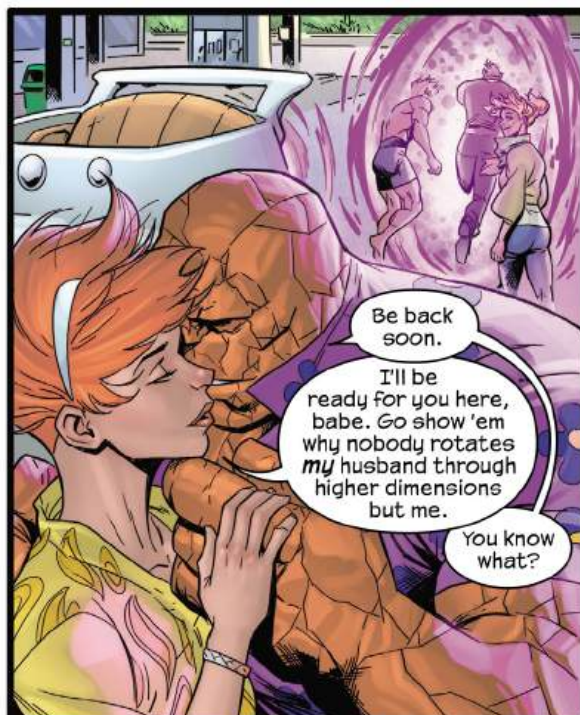
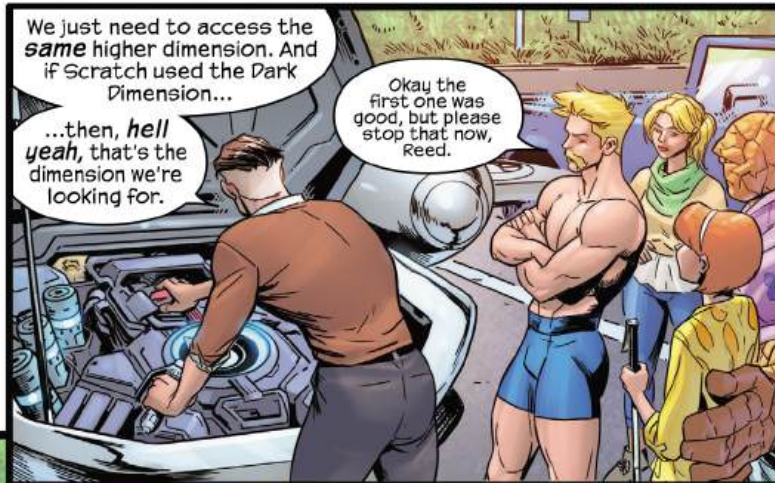


...Unless we rotate ourselves back, yeah? Because that's a thing we can do? Like, *right now*?

Well. In the vernacular of you and your peers, Johnny...



...hell yeah, that's a thing we can do.





IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

Scratch and Salem's Seven have already moved on-- that's *some* good luck at least!

Not sure I'd call dropping into a nest of *demons* "good luck," sis, but sure!



Y'know, one nice thing about the ol' Dark Dimension...

...you don't have to hold back on punchin' *everythin'* an' *everyone* here!

SMASH!



SMASH!

Argh!



'Course, it has its downsides too...





Reed knows this dimension is an illusion--it's just his brain interpreting what it sees as normal three-dimensional space.

It's no good!

He must find a way to not only see four-dimensionally, but to also push himself through that unfamiliar, unintuitive region of space-time. And he's got only seconds to do it.



It's a hard task.

Borderline impossible.

Focus, Reed.

Everything about him is built for three dimensions. He has to expand his mind and body into something they were never meant to understand, to something they never evolved to handle.

But borderline impossible... is still possible.

Focus.



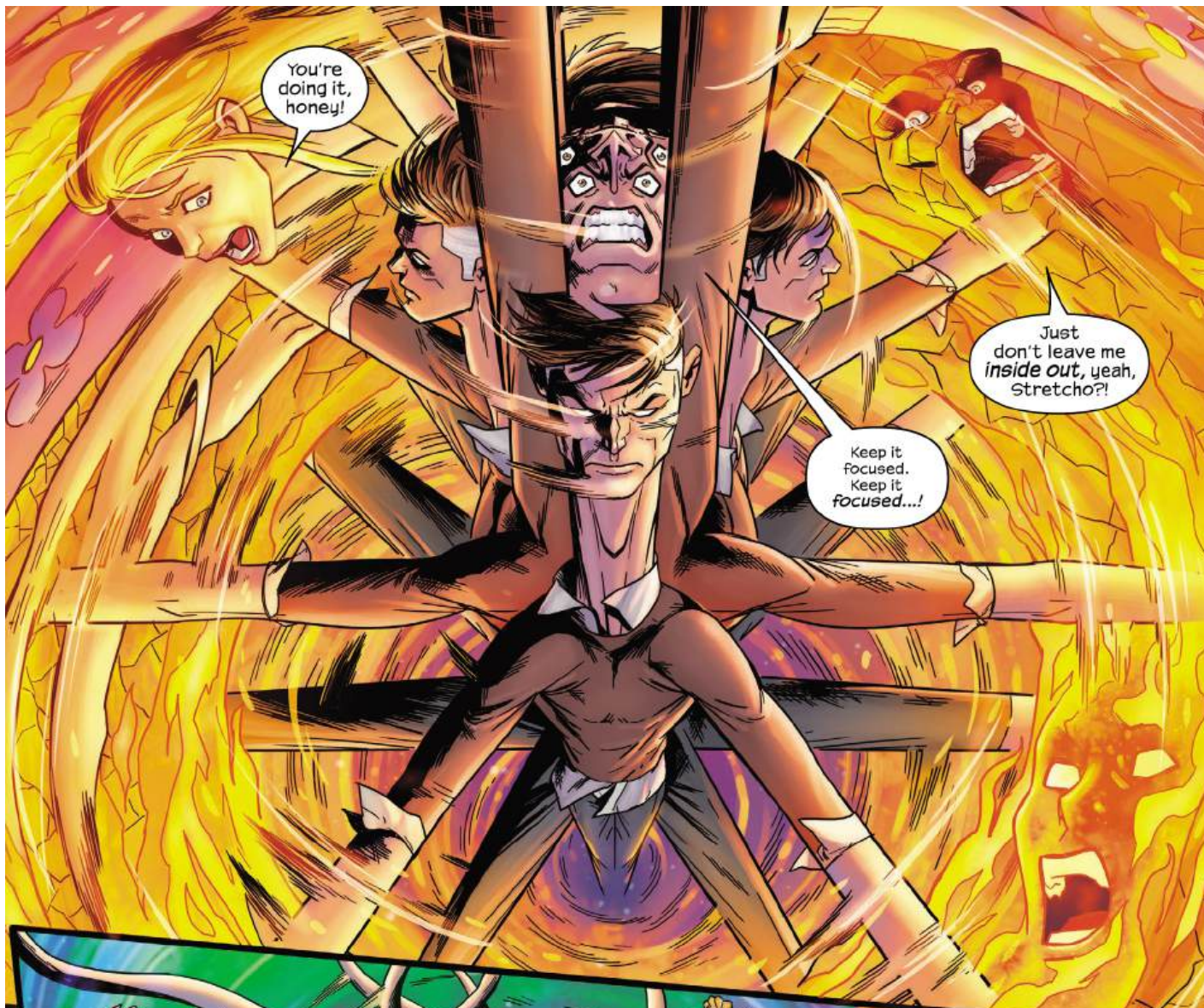
And so, in the middle of this hellish battlefield...

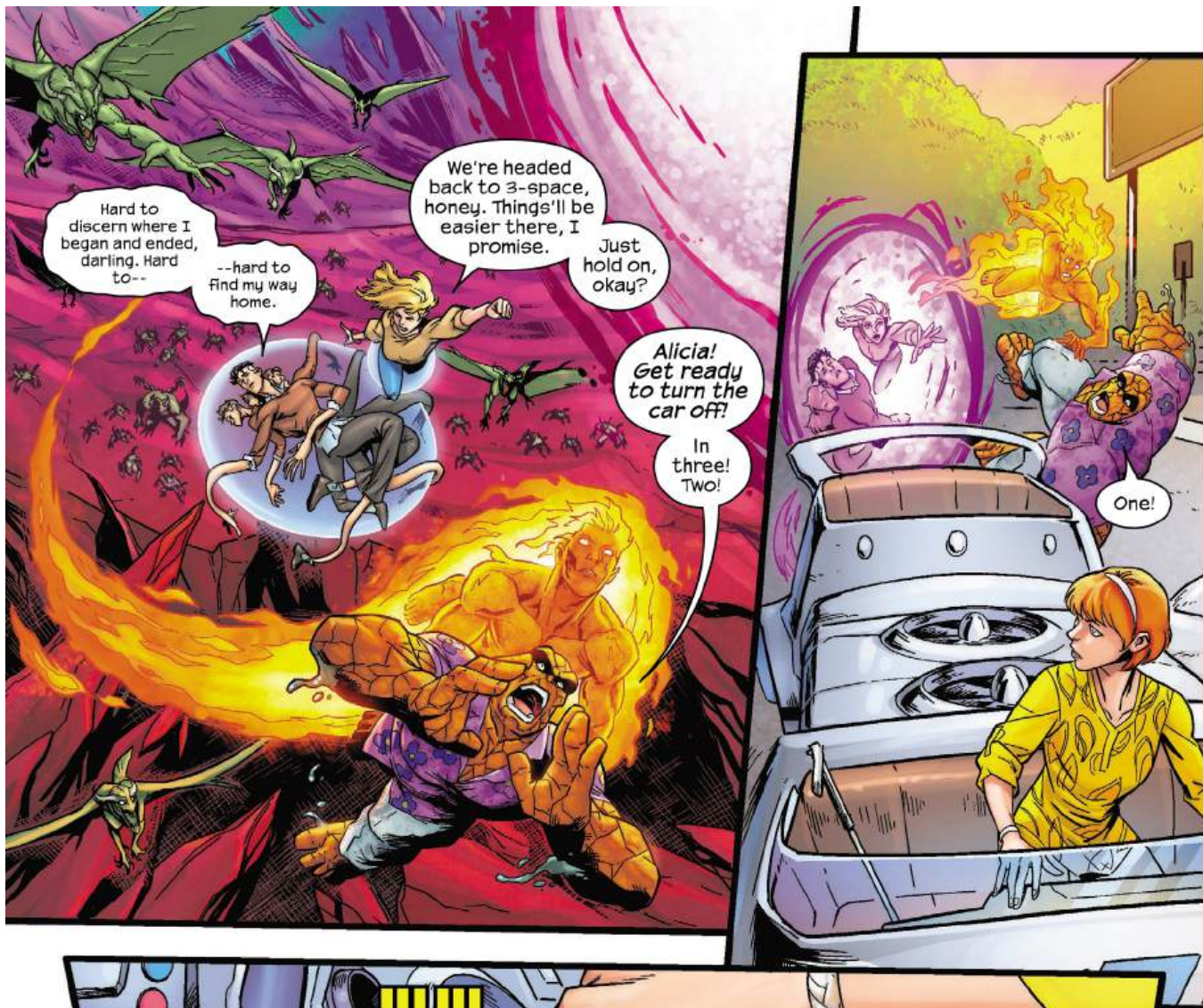
...a man directs his entire being toward his limits...

...and
stretches
them.



Whoa.













4:00 A.M....

Uh, guys,
hate to wake
you, but....



...this seems
like the kinda thing
we should know
about, yeah?

Sudden
algae bloom
threatens lake
swimmers...



5:00 A.M....

But what if it's *not*
mirror bacteria? Maybe
it's a *coincidence* and
the whole world's *not*
doomed??

Ah. I believe
you're rebuilding
psychologist Carl Jung's
theory of "synchronizität"
from first principles
here, Jonathan.

However, fully
explaining why that's
unlikely to be supported
requires a *lengthy* digression
into epistemology,
which--



6:00 A.M....

--in summary,
though, of course,
not in conclusion--hah!--
we see from both a *priori*
and, I believe, a *posteriori*
knowledge that one
simply cannot--

Thanks,
Reed, I'm
good.



now.

Oh god.
We're
too late.

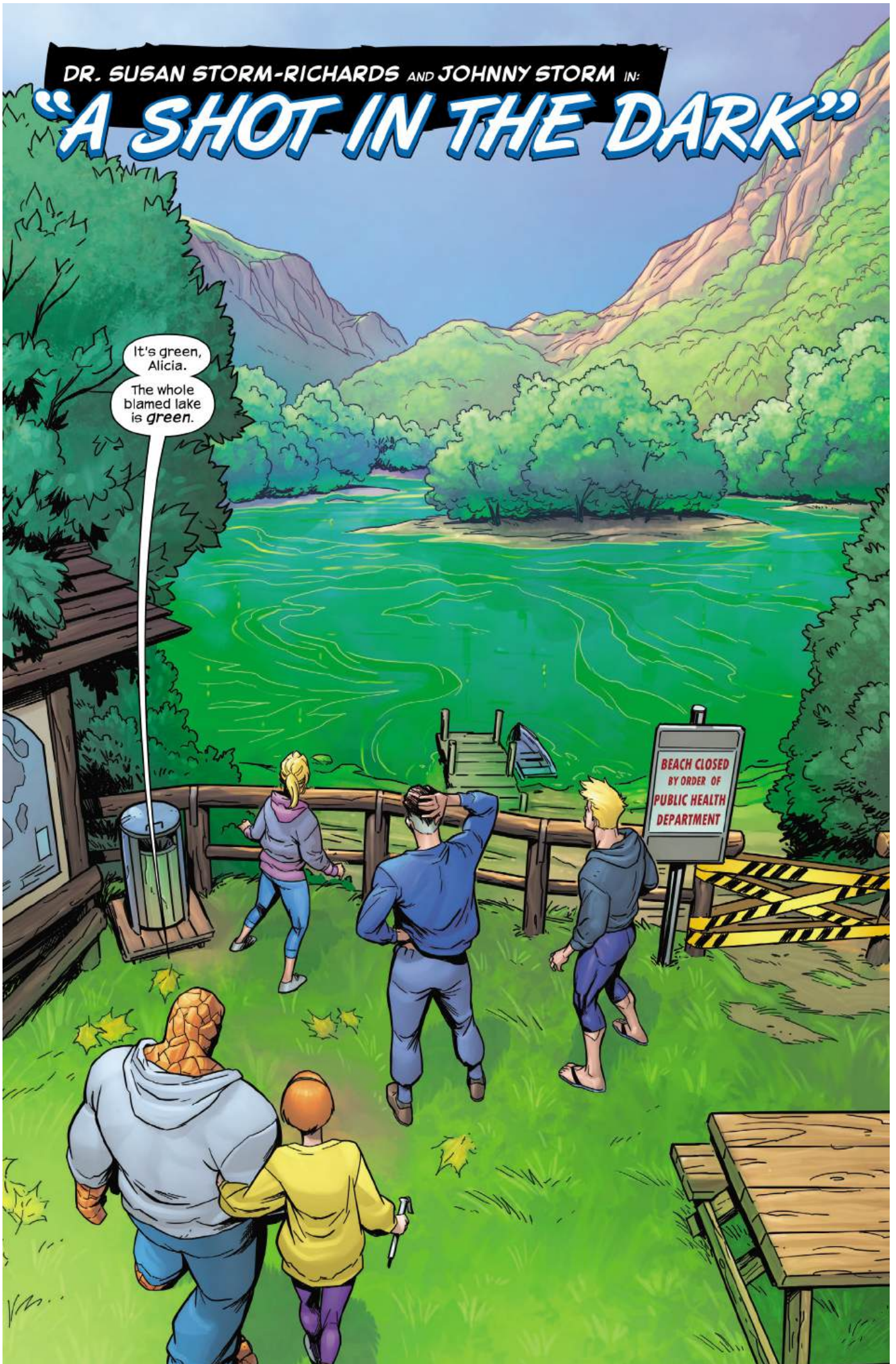
DR. SUSAN STORM-RICHARDS AND JOHNNY STORM IN:

"A SHOT IN THE DARK"

It's green,
Alicia.

The whole
blamed lake
is green.

BEACH CLOSED
BY ORDER OF
PUBLIC HEALTH
DEPARTMENT





Light's too bright to *directly* observe amino acids, but everything I *can* see suggests the same conclusion: this is photosynthetic cyanobacteria-- and it's been *mirrored*.

An' this is really gonna take over the *planet* an' *starve* everyone?



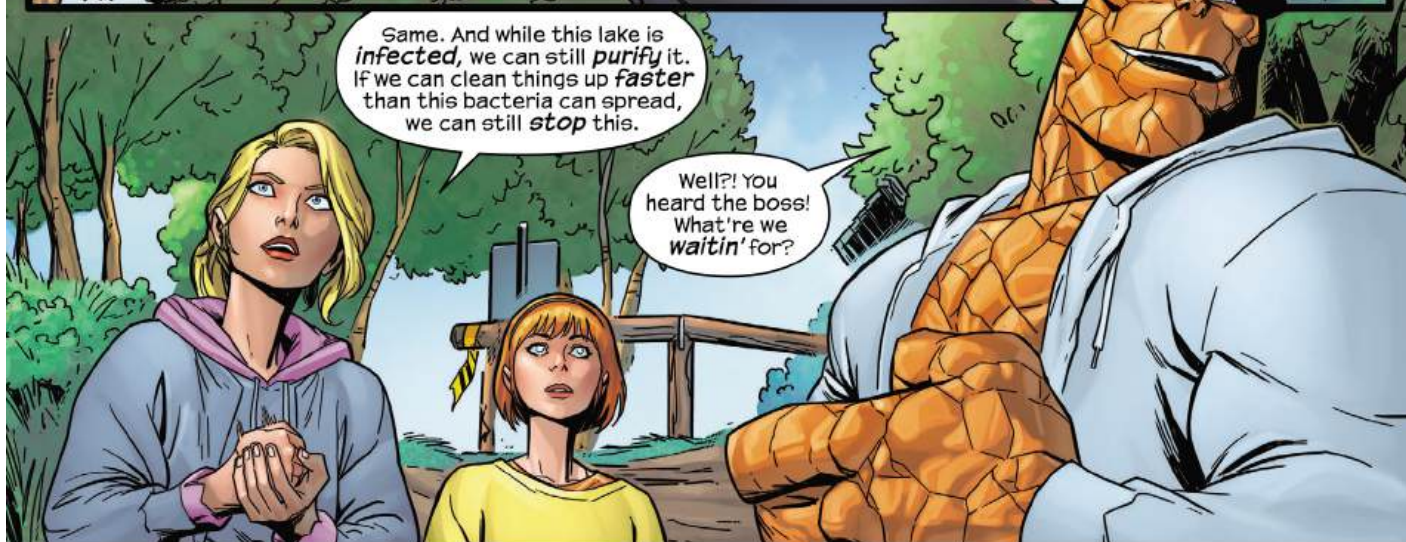
It's *already* doing that, Ben. From the bacteria's point of view, it found itself on a perfectly hospitable, sunny, watery world...

...without a single predator around that can *digest* it.



So--what, that's it? We lost? One stupid *microscopic* cell gets missed when I sterilize Ben and we're all, "Oh well! Nice try, *all life on Earth*--see you in a zillion years if intelligent life ever *re-evolves* from this mirror muck"?! No way. I refuse to accept it.

No way. I refuse to accept it.

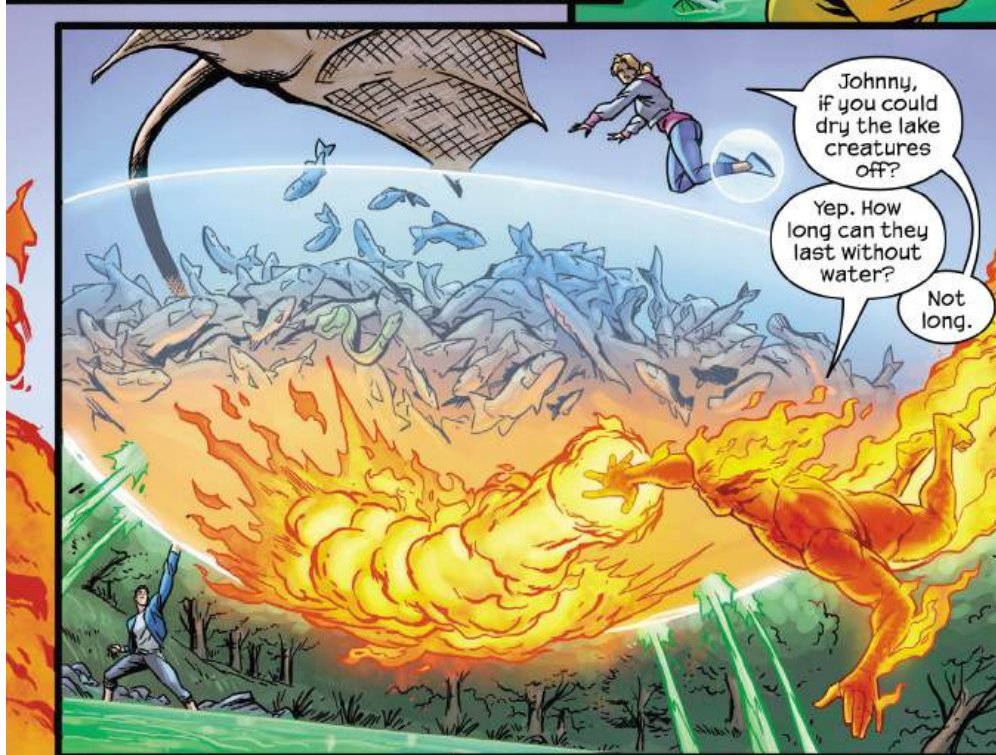


Same. And while this lake is *infected*, we can still *purify* it. If we can clean things up *faster* than this bacteria can spread, we can still *stop* this.

Well?! You heard the boss! What're we *waitin'* for?



Forget clobberin'-- it's *save the world* time!







Bud, we can't just *not* fix this.



Ben's right--there's got to be *something* we can do. Sue, I know they're microscopic, but could you-- I don't know, just *grab* the bacteria out of a lake?

Like with a whole bunch of really, *really* tiny force-fields?



The surface muck, sure, but that wouldn't be all of them. With so *many* cells, each so small as to be *invisible*...it's a good thought, but there's just no way, Alicia.



Best case, I'd still miss *thousands*, and we'd be right back where we started.

Come *on*! Four 'a us with *powers*, and we can't even take down a li'l *killer bacteria*?! We ended the *Reckoning War*! We beat up *Galactus*! More 'n once!

True. But there's just *one* of him, and he's *much* easier to see coming.

I'm truly sorry, Ben. This is a problem we can neither *punch* nor *reason* with.



Well, we gotta do *some*thin'!



--perhaps if we produced an EM field that-- no. Hmm.

If we could just...
Hrm.



Wait! I got it!!!



You said this bacteria feeds on *light*, yeah, Reed? So why doesn't Sue just turn the *whole sun* invisible for however long it takes for those photosynthetic jerks to starve to death?

No light, no bacteria, no problem! Done!!!



Oh, wait, except if we turned off the sun then the Earth'd freeze solid... Aaaaand starving the bad bacteria would kill all the good ones too, right?

Okay, never mind.
Stupid idea.



Jonathan.
My god.

I think that could actually work.

Uh, bud, we don't need you going all **Maker** on us here. We don't wanna **freeze the planet**, dude.

That's the beauty of it! We wouldn't **have** to! The Earth's heated by the sun, true, but **also** by its core, and there's a **colossal** amount of thermal mass to cool.

Approximate similar heat capacity in the inner and outer cores, adjust for the lithospheric thermal constant, and...

Yes! It'll be slightly cooler, but not **catastrophically** so-- and it'd take months for the oceans to freeze over, even in total darkness! Cyanobacteria starves to death in just **three days!**

We only need **72 hours** of darkness to solve this.

But there'd be, like-- **global repercussions** to turning off the sun, right?

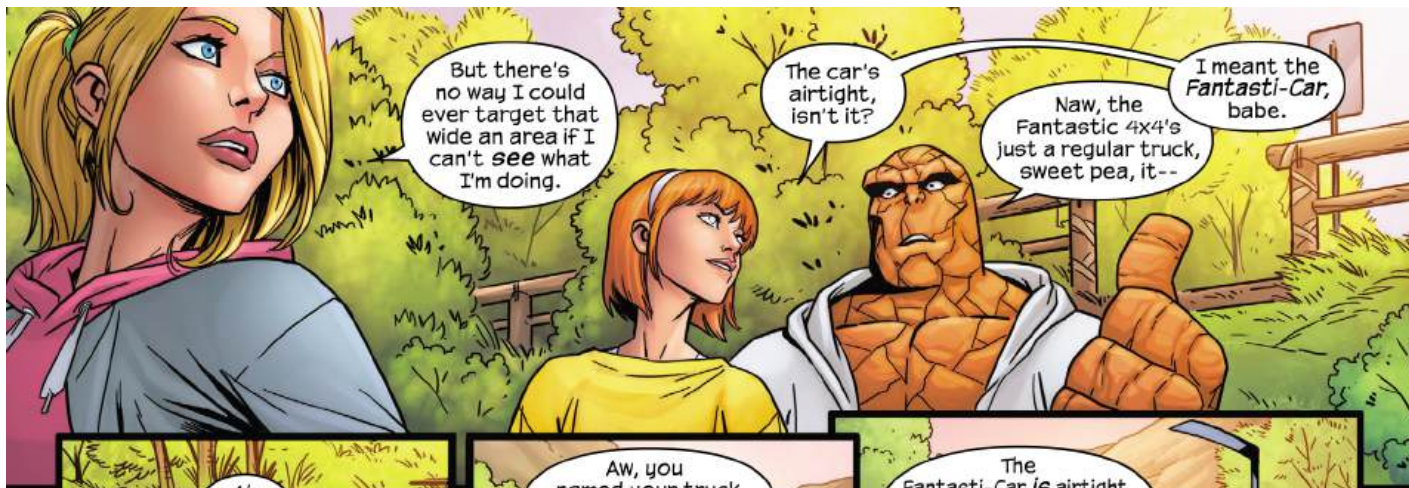
And we already ain't winnin' any **popularity contests**...

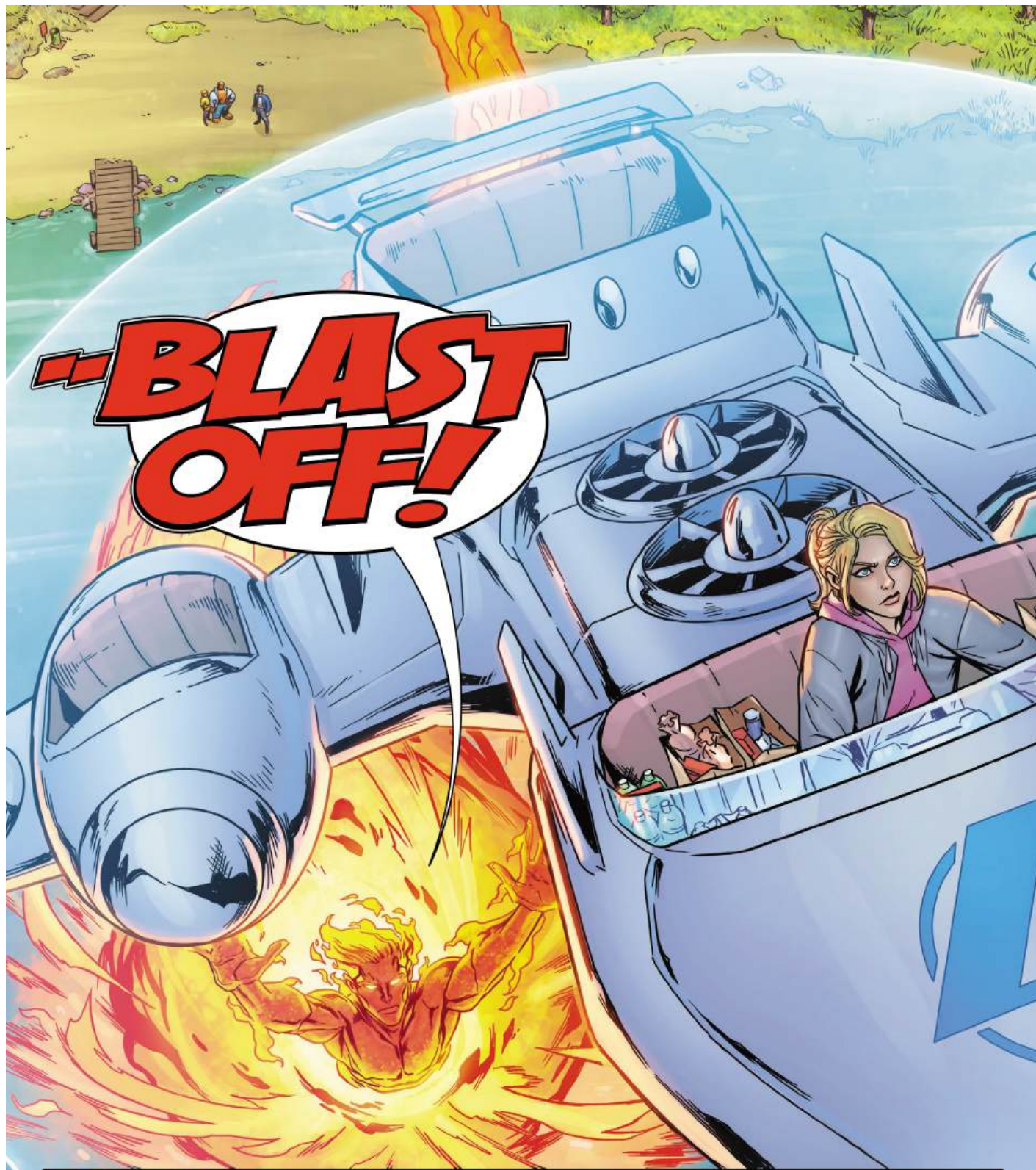
That's the brilliance of your plan, Johnny: We don't need the **whole** sun invisible!

If we act now, it's just a few **states** that need to be blacked out. And, yes, this'll kill all algae in the affected area, but we can **reintroduce** good bacteria from elsewhere-- even **during** our experiment!

Well...assuming, Sue, that you can sustain huge and repeated **sixteen-hour** uses of your powers against the **sun itself** for **three days straight**.

Well... hell. I can't **not** try it now.





I got people skills
too, y'know.

Hush.



You *really* think they'll be able to get everyone else on board with this?

I do. Ben, Alicia, Reed-- they always find a way.



You *really* think everyone's gonna be cool with us surprise *turnin' off the sun* for three days?

Once I clarify the issue, everyone *should* rationally see it's the only path forward.

...Right.

Topo, what's the nearest public event right now? Something that's being *broadcast*.



And so, it gives me *great pleasure*, on this *beautiful, sunny Kansas morning*, to declare our wonderful new library...

...officially *open*!



And I--

Can I help you?

Uh.



Thank you, Senator. You already have.

Hi, everyone! I'm Alicia Masters, and the foundation of Earth's food chain is being threatened by a spreading bloom of mirrored algae. Look up "mirror life" on your phone for more on *that*.



To stop it, the Invisible Woman and the Human Torch are in orbit, where they'll be plunging Kansas and a large part of the surrounding states into darkness for the next three days.

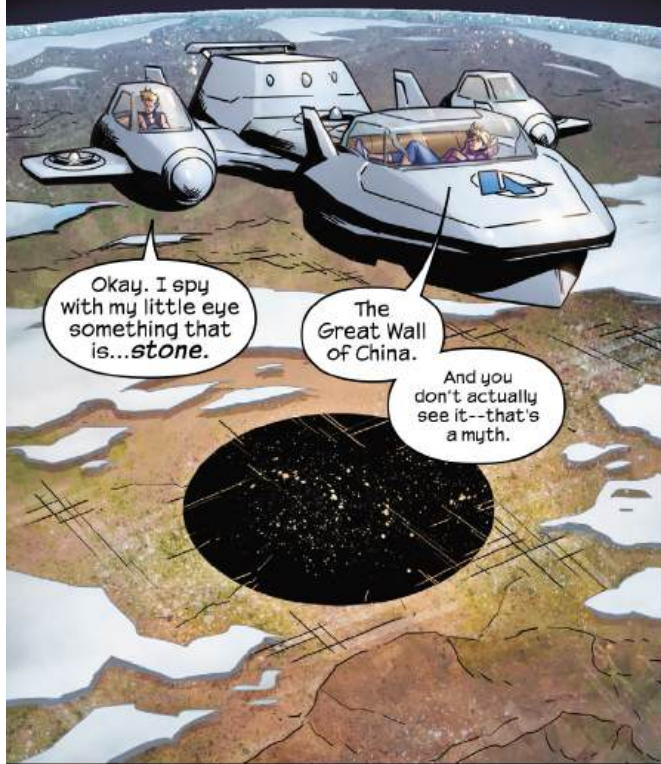
It'll be tricky, but all life on this planet hangs in the balance, so--everyone just power through, okay?

And, uh--I'd be pleased to take any questions you have?

Apologies, gentlemen! *We'll* handle security from here!



SEVERAL HOURS LATER...



Okay. I spy with my little eye something that is...stone.

The Great Wall of China.

And you don't actually see it--that's a myth.



Lucky guess. Okay, I spy with my little eye something that is...blue?

I think I'm about ready for another game, Johnny.



Same.

It was the ocean, by the way.



I missed you, bro.

Right back at you.



Really, though, I *did* miss you. And Reed and Ben and Alicia. It was weird living alone.

It made me, I don't know, appreciate what we've got here.

Our strange little lives.



Oof.

What's wrong?

Don't worry, I'm good. I've just never held an invisibility field so big for so long, and it feels like--like a limb I didn't even know I *had* is falling asleep.

Distraction time. Tell me a story.



Oh man, I didn't tell you how me and Spidey stopped a Venomed-up Kangaroo while you were away!

Let me guess: You did it with...fire?

Only partially. Okay, so what you need to know is we were facing off against **both** the marsupial and the super villain, and my mustache was only just coming in, so--



DAY TWO!

"My ears were filled with the curses the maniac still *shrieked* out; wherein she momentarily mingled my name with such a tone of *demon-hate*..."



My audiobook narrator seems to have stopped talking again, Johnny.

Sorry, sorry. I just didn't expect Jane Eyre to be *good*. Who knew classic books were *good*?

...Everyone?

On account of how they're classics??

I bet it's the title. They should've called it "The Mystery of the Murdery Attic."

It's public domain. You can print your own version called that.

No foolin'?



I wonder how they're doing down there.



Come on-- you told me yourself. They *got* this.



Wait...

...they *do* got this, right?



Shoulda figured one 'a you *crumb-bums* would try ta take advantage of the situation!

Of course I would, you fool! *Doctor Octopus* takes every advantage!



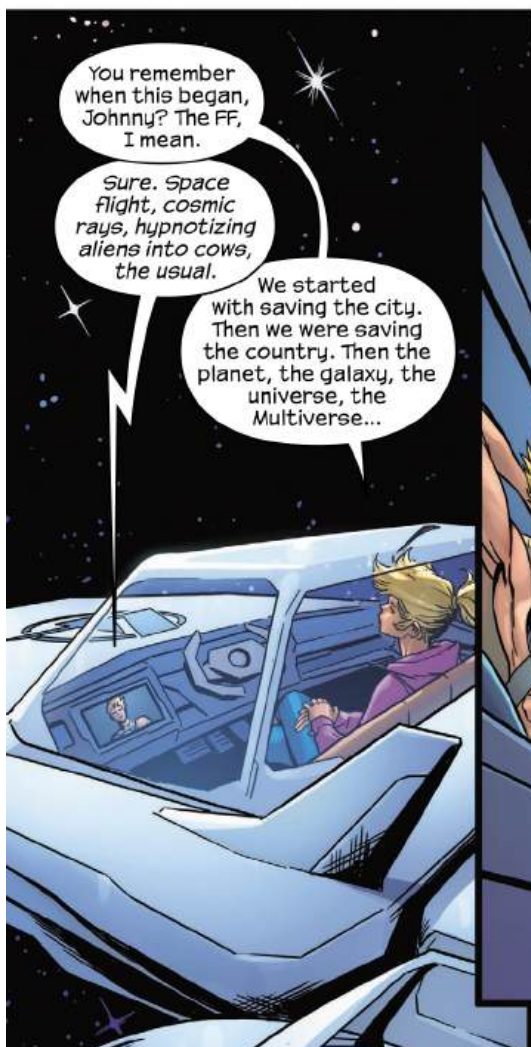
So do we, Doctor.

ALICIA!



Coming right up, Reed!

KA-CHUNK



You remember when this began, Johnny? The FF, I mean.

Sure. Space flight, cosmic rays, hypnotizing aliens into cows, the usual.

We started with saving the city. Then we were saving the country. Then the planet, the galaxy, the universe, the Multiverse...



What can I say? We're awesome.

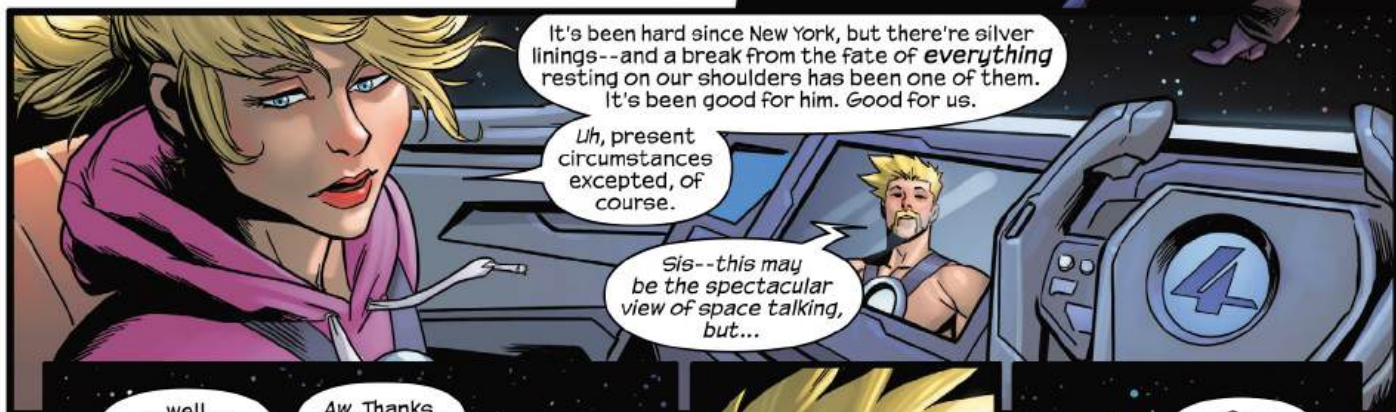
It weighs on him, you know. He can't stop himself from figuring out how impossibly high the odds are, calculating *exactly* how close a last-second victory was to a full-blown catastrophe.



You know why he shaved his beard?

He said it was "to restore faith in the Fantastic Four," yeah?

Heh. Maybe that was part of it, sure. But the night before, I noticed some new *gray hairs* coming in.





LATER...



This is the right place. Where is everyone?

Well, we're not late. The **Johnny Storm Space Patrol Service** prides itself on timely service, ma'am.

I'm serious...



...something's wrong, Johnny.

NOW!



What the hell?!



Maria Hill?!

We save the world and this is the thanks we get?

Johnny. Dr. Storm.

I'm hoping we can have a chat.



Honestly, Maria, we're not in this for the *medals*, so you needn't have gone to all this fuss.

Cute. But you *turned off* the sun. *Casually*.

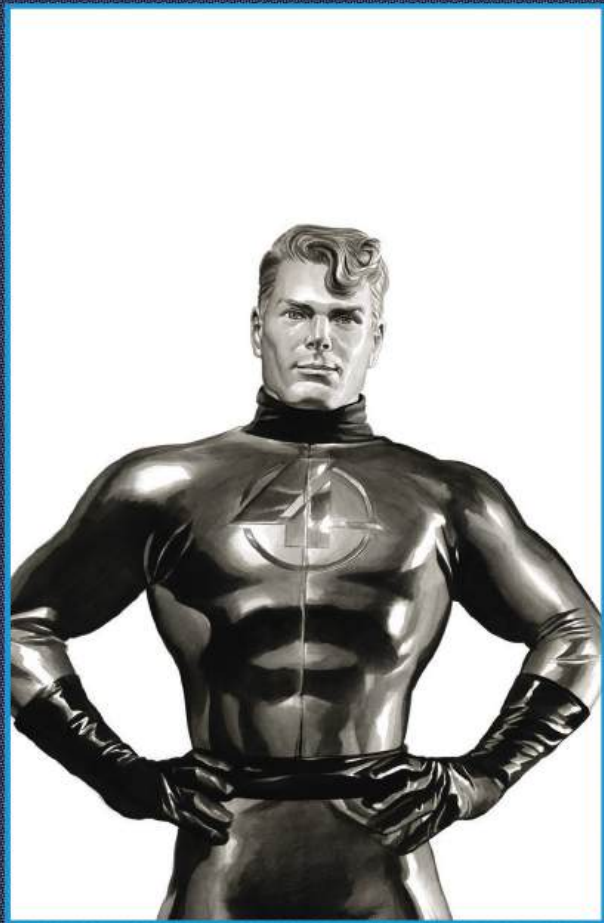
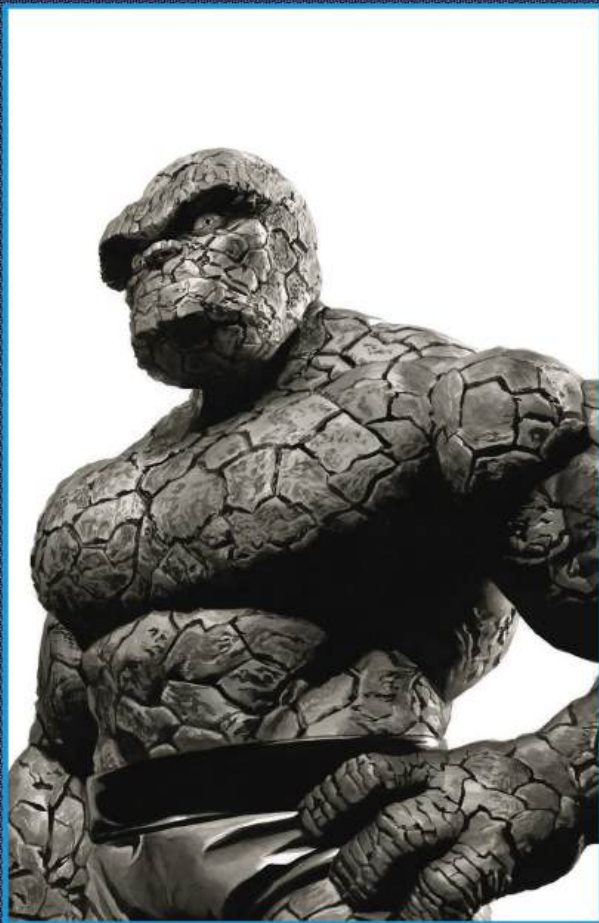
Showing that if you wanted to, you could end *all* life on this planet.



Turns out, the Invisible Woman's a walking, talking *mass-extinction* event, Doctor.

And I'm not the only one concerned by that.





#1-4 VARIANTS BY ALEX ROSS



#5 VARIANT BY ALEX ROSS



#1 ANNIVERSARY VARIANT
BY J. SCOTT CAMPBELL & SABINE RICH



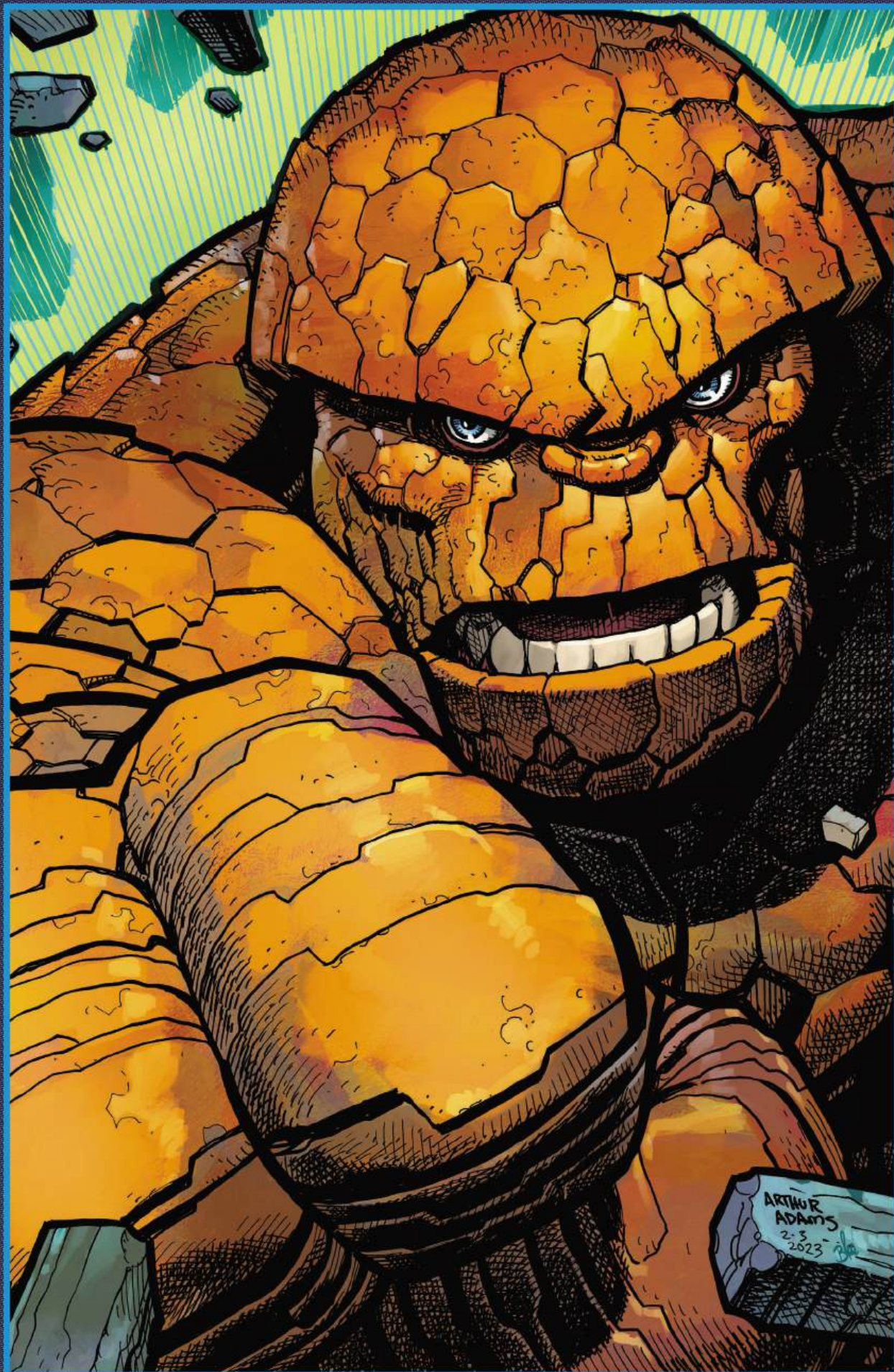
#1 RETRO VARIANT
BY J. SCOTT CAMPBELL & SABINE RICH



#1 VARIANT
BY FRANK MILLER & ALEX SINCLAIR



#1 HIDDEN GEM VARIANT
BY JACK KIRBY & MORRY HOLLOWELL



#1 VARIANT BY **ARTHUR ADAMS & FEDERICO BLEE**



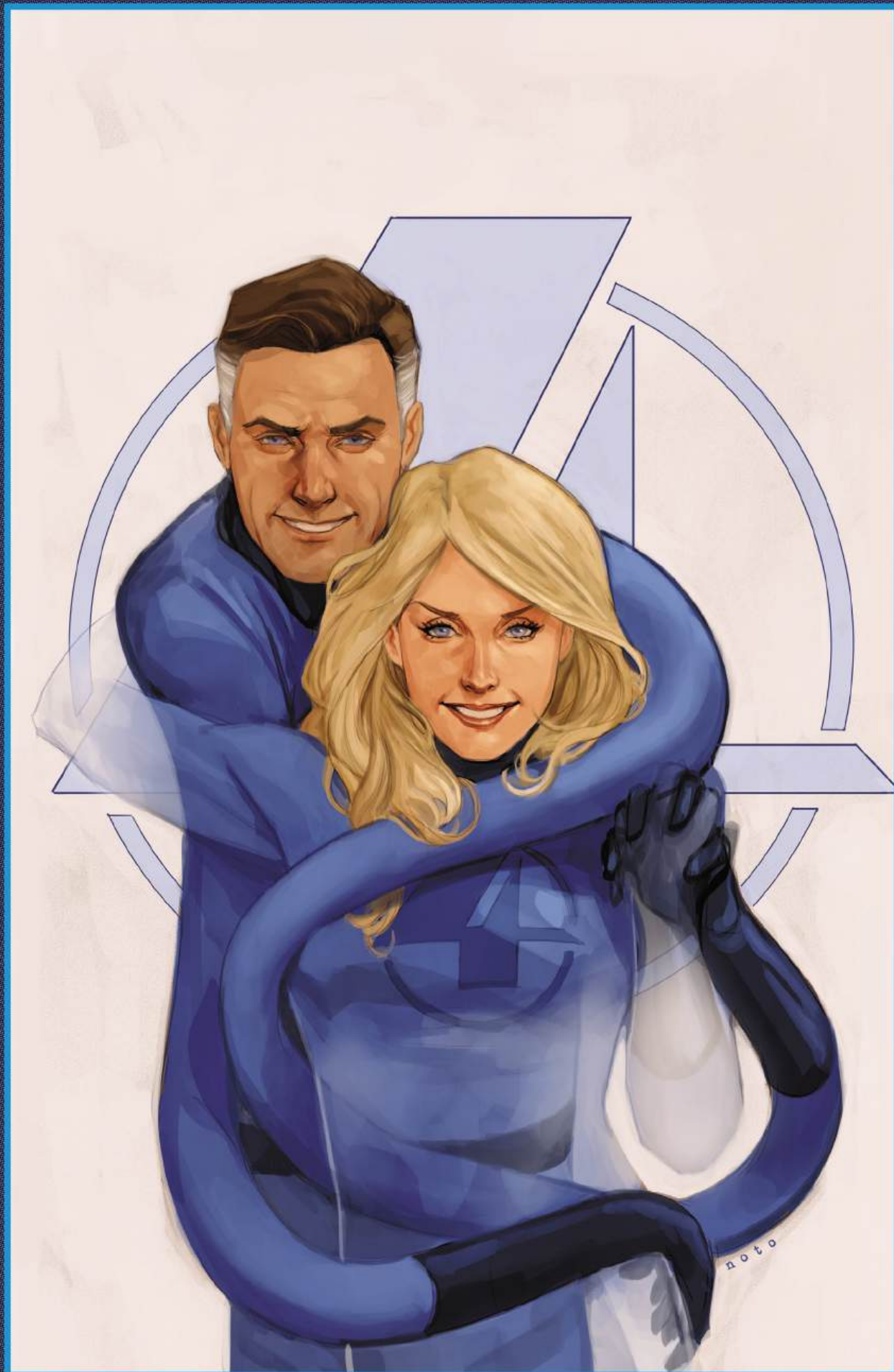
#1 VARIANT
BY IBAN COELLO & JESUS ABURTOV



#1 HEADSHOT VARIANT
BY TODD NAUCK & RACHELLE ROSENBERG



#1 X-TREME MARVEL VARIANT
BY PHIL NOTO



#2 VARIANT BY PHIL NOTO



#2 VARIANT
BY CHRISSIE ZULLO



#2 MARVEL UNIVERSE VARIANT
BY PEACH MOMOKO



#3 VARIANT
BY JOHN CASSADAY & MATT MILLA



#3 CLASSIC HOMAGE VARIANT
BY PHIL JIMENEZ & DAVID CUIEL



#4 STORMBREAKERS VARIANT
BY CHRIS ALLEN & DAVID CURIEL



#4 VARIANT
BY JOSHUA "SWAY" SWABY



#6 VARIANT
BY KAARE ANDREWS



#5 TIMELESS VARIANT
BY ALEX ROSS



#5 TIMELESS SKETCH VARIANT
BY ALEX ROSS



#6 TIMELESS VARIANT
BY ALEX ROSS



#6 TIMELESS SKETCH VARIANT
BY ALEX ROSS

"Fantastic Four is a breath of fresh air, reminding us this franchise is fun, adventurous and accessible to all readers." — AIPT

SOMETHING HAS GONE **TERRIBLY WRONG IN NEW YORK!**

THE THING AND ALICIA ARE TRAVELING ACROSS AMERICA TO ESCAPE IT! But when they stop for the night and wake up the morning before they arrived, they find themselves caught in a time loop that's been going on since before they were born! Meanwhile, Reed and Sue are on the run from their troubles — and make an unfortunate stop in a small town full of killer Doombots! But what is their terrible secret? And Johnny is left alone in New York — a city that hates and fears him! So it's time for a new identity — and a new job! Can the FF find their way back together and somehow rebuild their lives?



COLLECTING **FANTASTIC FOUR (2022) #1-6** —
BY RYAN NORTH, IBAN COELLO, IVAN FIORELLI AND JESUS ABURTOV.

